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By Mrs. J. Kent Spender.

ILLUSTRATED BY WARREN B. DAVIS.

THE  
CHOICE  
SERIES  
No. 63.





# CECIL ROSSE :

A SEQUEL TO

## EDITH TREVOR'S SECRET.

BY

MRS. HARRIET LEWIS,

*Author of "Her Double Life," "Lady Kildare," "Beryl's Husband," "The Two Husbands," "Sundered Hearts," "Edda's Birthright," etc., etc.*

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# ZINA'S AWAKING

A Novel.

BY

MRS. J. KENT SPENDER.

*Silvan Headland Spender*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY WARREN B. DAVIS.

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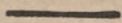
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BOOK I.









TO  
THE SON,

WHO WAS WITH ME IN THE AUTUMN OF 1887,  
IN A LITTLE HOTEL ON THE SALVAN PASS.

WHERE THE FOLLOWING STORY WAS PLANNED,

TO BE WRITTEN SOON AFTERWARDS

IN ANOTHER MOUNTAIN RETREAT.







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# ZINA'S AWAKING.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A DINNER-PARTY IN CHESTER-SQUARE.

A WARM summer evening in the heart of the London season.

Stuart Newbolt seemed perfectly happy. Handsome, young-looking, reputed to be rich, and of a singular charm of manner, he made a very graceful host at the little dinners which he gave twice a week to an odd mixture of fashionable and literary folk. He well knew how to guide the conversation, how to interest everybody, and how to send the guests away at the end of the evening, feeling as if for once they had been really brilliant, since Mr. Newbolt had been so interested in all they said and had laughed so heartily at all their little witticisms. And then, as Lady Catering had afterwards told her intimate friend—whom she mentioned every two minutes in her conversation as “the dear Duchess”—“there never was anything so perfect as his table decoration; my dear, it was simply a dream; the whole table covered with some blue



gauzy material so waved and puckered as to look just like a lake, with white water-lilies peeping out in every direction, and then groups of Salviati vases filled with orchids, and two large Salviati candelabra—it was too lovely!”

It was Stuart Newbolt's only child, Zina, who arranged the table herself, often spending many hours over it, and each time trying to find some new combination of colour and flowers, and it was she who had suggested the white panelling which with *café au lait* brocade hangings and Venetian glass was considered so unique and, as Lady Catering said, “so becoming, which is much more important.”

Zina was not so popular as her father, but everyone admitted that Stuart Newbolt had a splendid coadjutor in his well-trained daughter, who presided at the head of the table, possessing that special knowledge which could make her society agreeable to literary or political men whenever she chose to exert herself, and who could on other occasions be not only discreet, but silent and enigmatical as the Sphinx, and beautiful as the room which was semi-darkened and flower-laden, with the balconies all ablaze with blossoms, shining in the westering sun—a medley of scents, colours, pictures, and china, in which the sights and sounds of London were effectually excluded.

No one could have guessed that Mr. Newbolt was feeling unwell that evening, or that he had recently had occasion to consult his family physician, for he was looking his very best. And though there were some gossips who did not hesitate to accuse him of wearing a belt to diminish the size of his figure, or of using cosmetics to soften a skin growing a little wrinkled and rigid with advancing years, there was nothing affected or foppish about him. Nothing could be more free from artifice than



his manner that evening as he laughed gaily at some sally made by his pretty ward, Eva Capern, who, although only lately married, was already becoming well-known for her good looks and vivacity, her smart toilettes from La Ferrière or Janet, and her Sunday evening poker parties.

"Society may be rotten," she was saying; "but what would you have? We are the products of society, and if you reform it you must kill us off. For instance, would you really have us dress dowdily and give to the poor?"

"Beauty unadorned," Mr. Newbolt laughed back.

"A thousand thanks!" she replied; "but then you would at once find me out, and know that it is my art to deceive you and make you think that I am pretty, when really it is only my gowns. Besides, to dress out of the fashion is to become *déclassée*; and in London, this 'Niobe' of nations, one can't be too particular."

"A woman should be like a diamond; the more beautiful the less conspicuous the setting," said a voice from the other side of the table.

"Yes, and those that need a setting should be killed off. One of the problems of the age is to find out an alias for all sorts of infanticide," laughed another.

"It is these wicked ideas which make a nation ripe for revolution," remonstrated the other voice, which belonged to a faded middle-aged and quietly-dressed woman who, with her white-headed husband of melancholy, expressive face, and a length of beard which Aaron could not have surpassed, were somewhat unwonted figures at Stuart Newbolt's table.

The faintest, politest, delicatest frown passed over the brow of the host. He prided himself on the diplomatic talents often brought into play in eluding that gravity which he considered to be fatal to the digestion. "The Radicals call it evolution rather



than revolution, rehabilitation rather than dilapidation, they are enthusiasts," he said lightly.

But Mary Carruthers and her husband, the "retired Scotch professor," as his wife vaguely phrased it—whom Zina had insisted on inviting—were not to be so easily put down. Apparently they thought they had a mission to perform, and Stuart Newbolt winced when they went on to discourse of the decadence of the Romans and the frivolity of the second Empire.

The lady had a nervous way of speaking which Stuart Newbolt could not have tolerated even from the lips of the pretty, loveless, self-indulgent creature who had been confided to his care in her orphanhood, and whom his system of education had rendered so fascinating that everyone forgot her selfishness and admired her the more for her fragility.

He was too critical to be sympathetic, and had no such thing as a broad comprehension of human beings different from himself. And that the guests at his table should have any more ultimate object than that of toying in dinner-party fashion with those 'imps of ideas' which flit from one mind to another in rapid converse, was sure to be annoying to him. It mattered little if this rapid converse involved a certain amount of iconoclasm in which the idols of one's neighbours happened to be battered, but it mattered a good deal if anything like a skeleton intruded at the feast.

Yet not only did the Carruthers discourse of a sort of socialism which was hateful to him, and jarred on his nerves like a false note, but other things grated on him. An old Canadian whom he had come across in some of his travels and who had impressed him by his weather-beaten face, huge Bar-dolph nose, and bushy eyebrows meeting like pent-houses over eyes which were singularly mild and grey, as well as by his large store of anecdotes—seemed inclined to turn the talk on still more seri-



ous matters. The Canadian had come to London to sell a new patent in connection with photography, and Stuart Newbolt cursed his own folly for his haste in inviting him, when he found him irrelevantly boasting of the power which photography would bring to bear on the recent discoveries in astronomy.

It was worse still that Mrs. Carruthers should try to give a religious turn to the conversation, naively quoting Dr. Chalmers in a middle-class sort of fashion. A woman, as he thought to himself, might talk commonplace sentiment. It was the speciality of the sex to do so, the only hope being to draw such women into a stream of chatter that fortunately kept them from dwelling too much on the troubles of existence. But Mrs. Carruthers, who had her own public, was not to be so arrested, and Stuart Newbolt did not quite know what to do with her, when, determining not to come to closer quarters on questions of this sort, he contented himself with remarking quietly that Dr. Chalmers was "a little out of date."

He said this with **an urbane** smile, and that polite intentness which, as a master of deportment, he plumed himself on never losing. One might have noticed that he kept an extra degree of politeness for middle-aged women, and a look which somehow told them their day was over. But whether it was that Mary Carruthers gathered courage from her desperation, or whether she resented the attempt which had been made to repress her, she quoted, in a tone of enthusiasm,

"Though worlds on worlds in myriad myriads roll,  
What know we greater than the soul?"

The quotation was made in a highly-pitched voice. It arrested the attention, so that everyone was listening. The voice was not only highly-pitched, but there was a sort of thrill in it which made Mr.



Newbolt wince as if he were listening to some dissonant sound. Was it not well known that he hated anything like religious discussions, considering them bad form at the table, and here was a little woman, with opinions in direct opposition to his own, venturing to come into collision with him?

Lady Catering smiled slightly as the host, keeping his self-command, looked at his guest surprised, and then tried to be satirically amused at the groove into which the conversation was settling itself. Mrs. Carruthers had evidently intended to enlarge on her quotation, but the rest of her words sank into a sort of frightened whisper as she came aware, not only that her host was waiting with some fruit on his uplifted fork, but that there was a sudden hush of other voices, and that all his guests were also listening.

Her cheeks were suddenly dyed with colour. Could the observant Lady Catering have made a mistake when she imagined that a fair-haired man who sat on the left side of the hostess—a deep-eyed, dreamy-looking young fellow, who had not yet found his vocation in life, but had made some little reputation as a musician and amateur artist—was answering an appealing look in Zina Newbolt's face, when he came to the rescue, and said lightly—

“Who knows that we are not deceived by our senses—if the stars themselves may not be an illusion?” And then he backed Mrs. Carruthers' quotation by asking sentimentally, “What is our waking but a dream?”

Mr. Newbolt's ward tittered audibly as she gazed down at her beautifully modelled, diamond be-ringed fingers. These, at least, seemed to her no illusion, and she was quite of opinion that they might have served as models for a Canova or a Thorwaldsen.

“And if you could argue these questions till the stars burnt out, you would never settle them,”





ZINA.—See Chapter II.







responded the host, in the light tone he generally adopted—a tone of half-ironical entreaty—when he wished to protest against our gravity as a race.

“Those so-called musicians have a great opinion of themselves,” he was thinking, as he flashed back an amused, comprehensive glance at his ward.

But Stephen Dewe’s voice did not persist. It was sufficient for him that the jarred look on Mr. Newbolt’s usually impassable clean-shaven face was lessened. He knew him well enough to be perfectly sure that a long story or a philosophical speech from a young man who should have known better would be sure to prove boring, something like having to listen to folks reciting poetry. He knew also perfectly well that though Stuart Newbolt would be likely to give **his** daughter a piece of his mind about her absurd obstinacy in wishing to invite this tactless woman, he prided himself on being cosmopolitan, on making excuses for everyone and would have no intention of being found fault with for belabouring the popular superstitions. It mattered little to Stephen Dewe if his host should be like Archimedes, who wanted to reduce this little earth to the standing-point from which he could move the whole. Nothing mattered but that he should be able to “keep in” with him, and at the same time to obey the behests of the beautiful creature who was sitting by his side. Then the conversation slid back into the ordinary topics—the last singer who was making any sensation in the fashionable world, the last good picture, or even the last ball at which some well-known beauties had appeared, as well as the last stormy debate in the House. If much of this chatter about actors and actresses, singers at the opera, and the latest fashions was a little more *banal* and trivial than Stuart Newbolt generally liked, he at least had ceased to beat an impatient tattoo with his feet beneath the table, and



had probably to thank himself, for the party was not large enough to indulge in that sudden gabble and gallop of tongues which might have covered the universal resolution to seek a change of topic.



## CHAPTER II

### A TIRED BREADWINNER.

"YOU see, my dear, I told you it would be a mistake for me to accept your father's invitations. I could not even afford the dress," said Mary Carruthers with a despondent sigh, when Zina Newbolt visited her a few days afterwards in the ill-furnished lodgings in Great Coram Street, which told an eloquent tale of the hard struggle for existence carried on in them from day to day.

By daylight she wore an ill-fitting serge dress and her hair was tightly gathered up in a knot at the back of her head. There were downward lines of patient endurance about the nose and the mouth, but there was a look in the steady eyes which contradicted the mouth, telling you that the meekness had not been hers by choice.

She was in a state of depression which was not usual to her.

"Do you think they were so very bad—the



deficiencies in my attire?" she asked as if aware that in some way her appearance had not been a success; and Zina could not tell her that the deficiencies in her conversation were worse. Stuart Newbolt did not often allow himself to show his irrepressible impatience with everything which was old-fashioned or commonplace; but those who knew him intimately were well aware that his fastidious nature was continually disgusting him with the ill-chosen wording of a sentence, the infliction of a hackneyed quotation or twice-repeated anecdote. Unconsciously to herself his daughter had fallen into the habit of watching him furtively, being constantly aware of that something in the attitude of her father's mind which made him acutely sensitive to the deficiencies of his neighbours. She knew that woman's talk as a general rule was condemned by him as "trumpery," and that he complained of the perpetual jabber and clatter of their tongues. Zina adapted herself perfectly to his idiosyncrasy in this respect, knowing when to be silent and when to speak in few words. He prided himself on having educated a very unusual woman. In the case of his ward—Eva Capern—the triumph had not been so great, though Eva was shrewd enough to know also how to humour her guardian's peculiar fancy.

But Mary Carruthers! Her very vocation was to pander to the tastes of her own sex, consequently to make a trade of what Stuart Newbolt condemned as commonplace chatter.

" 'It's such a comfort to have no intellect,' as Jack Poyntz says in the play," answered Mary good-temperedly, when the Professor nervously protested against such 'trash' as the 'Family Sympathiser' lying openly on his table and took care to clear it out of the way. Zina's experiment at transplanting her had only proved a failure. If Mary had been



a person of no views the experiment might have been more successful. But Mrs. Carruthers had very strong 'views,' and though she spoke just now in a deprecating tone that was not natural to her, she was secretly conscious of the existence of her own little circle of admirers.

"Do you know, I can remember when I was young, and when I had golden dreams and thought that I could do something better—but that was long ago—I am content now with the lowest rung of the ladder. I have my boys and girls to think of, and I have to put up with these London lodgings—a dingy sort of den isn't this? It seems to me a thousand times more dismal after your beautiful and artistic surroundings, but you know I could not write in a house like yours; I should be looking about me all the time. Heigh-ho; I am hard up just now for a plot," she said with a sigh.

" 'The moving accident is not my trade,  
To freeze the blood I have no ready art.' "

And then she added, with a half-hysterical laugh, as if she would otherwise have broken into sobs, "I am not so very clever, though I *do* write books."

The dignified Zina, who so rarely unbent to the world, answered by kissing her friend affectionately. "You are better than clever," she said, "you are charming. I should like to know what your husband and children would do without you; it is you, after all, who are the breadwinner of your family.

"Forced to be so by accident, but not by nature," rejoined the other woman, glancing at a table, covered as usual with untidy papers. "I am translating now, always translating: but I should have been happier if I had not been called upon to fill a place, even as a translator, in my generation."

"You are not your bright self when you talk like



that—you are not the '*Liebes Mütterlein*' whom I have learned to honour, when you insist on running yourself down. What matter if your intuitions are keener and finer than your intellect? That is the way with most of us."

Mary Carruthers shook her head. "I am mediocre, and it is my duty to protect the world from the fatal spread of mediocrity. When I succeed and do my best, I am only—according to your father—'one of the fools who are the prophets of Philistia.' That is my trade. I succeed best when I take it up; there is one chord common to the largest mass of readers which vibrates when you touch it, and that is—vulgarity."

"You judge yourself hardly when you talk so sadly. And it is your sense of humour," said her friend, "which saves you from being too sentimental."

Another heartfelt sigh. "Yet I am one of the folk whose trade it is to revel in the aroma of delicately-scented sorrows, shutting themselves away from their kind, and hugging sorrow to their souls."

She began to laugh, and then came the truth of the matter in the revelation of a little womanly vanity, and a good deal of personal soreness.

"You mustn't ask me any more, dear—you can't expect me to talk as they talk at your father's table. I never believe in conversation as a fine art and doubt if it ever existed. The brilliant wit does not look very brilliant when it is put down on paper, and as to the jests of professional jesters, if they could be repeated in the present days, we should think them—horrid. I must be in earnest in what I say, but I have no time to read—no time even to think. All I have to do is to keep spinning my own brains for the sort of stories which will please the '*Family Sympathiser*.' I have my suspicions that James would tell me the writing is slipshod because I have to write so fast at times.



But it must be enriched with a few luscious patches of tall talk, and I must always choose plots which catch. At one time the run was on governesses who married lords, poor girls adopted by great ladies, and ushers at school who were peers in disguise—the next run was on burglars, magnificent Dick Turpins who stood six feet two in their stockings—and now even ghosts are getting hackneyed. My editor says, ‘Try Doppelgänger’—he means ‘doubles,’ but ‘Doppelgänger’ sounds grander—and how do I know,” said Mary in her self-mockery, “whether I am equal to phantasms of the living, when I can’t paint the living themselves? Meanwhile I must keep the wolf from the door—so I am doing a little translating.”

But Zina was ready with her comfort.

“After all you are writing for the largest class of readers—a class which is constantly increasing, and which must be supplied with innocent food. You may number your readers by millions—think of the numbers educated in the elementary schools.”

“Yes,” said Mary, laughing still, though tears were in her eyes, as she blushed like a girl, eager for praise—when do we cease to care for it?—

“If one could hope to keep personal touch with them—if one could lift them up a little—only a step or two at a time—without pretending to be superior. What is it someone says,

“‘Speak to the heart! for that alone is sweet;  
Weak words are mighty that with heartblood beat?’”

“But when an editor says to me that he must have something ‘racy’ that I must not even speak about the things I care about for fear my readers should think it ‘slow’, when you have to give them such diet as is generally required by the ‘Family Sympathiser’”—and Mary quoted in mock-tragic tones, from a writer on the same stuff, “‘The



Duchess made tea for all the little titled ones sitting around,'” till the tears rolled down her cheeks from her excessive laughter.

Then relapsing into a sort of mock gravity, she exclaimed,

“They say that observation is nearly the whole of human genius. But how in the world I should like to know am I to observe, shut up between the four walls of this room, and how am I to know about—detectives—for instance?”

There was a drollery of absolute despair in the solemn intonation of the last few words, but before Zina could answer that she had better try to put herself into connection with Scotland yard, she had forgotten herself and was descanting on the merits of her husband.

“Now, dear, *he* has a mind if you like, a mind which fills me with the profoundest veneration—a mind far above pot-boilers—you remember his book on Schopenhauer?”

Zina shrugged: she *did* remember it, and how the expenses of publishing it had reduced his family nearly to destitution. She had no great admiration for the professor, who condescended, in spite of his high ideals, to let himself be mainly supported by the labours of his wife.

She did not like to hurt Mary's feelings, and she had never had courage to ask “professor of *what?*” She had to content herself with a vague idea that Dr. Carruthers had been a professor of Oriental languages, or perhaps of philosophy — she did not exactly know which — at Glasgow or Aberdeen — here again her ideas were misty. She owed the ‘professor’ a grudge from the various occasions on which she had had to parry her father's facetious inquiries on the subject.

In her secret heart she looked upon the self-contented old man as a petulant and wayward child,



whose luxuries had to be pandered to at the expense of other people, and who was one of the most troublesome of all the little ones belonging to this poor, persevering woman, whose energy and determination endeared her to the few friends who knew her as intimately as Zina did. But before she could give utterance to the irrational irritation, which she felt whenever the Professor and his powerful intellect were referred to, there came a patter of footsteps, and a whirlwind of petticoats and knickerbockers, through the door, which was burst open without any ceremony.

"Tell us a story, mammy, you promised us one when we had done our lessons," cried three or four squeaky and eager little voices, the noisy interlopers falling aggressively upon their mother before they saw that she had a visitor.

"Hush, darlings, be quiet. Father is sleeping downstairs," responded the mother, all her sweet homeliness and natural liveliness of manner returning to her, as she gazed proudly at these little incentives to her unwilling literary labour.

"Go on, let me hear you," cried Zina, though she could not help feeling rather out of it, as the "Mütterlein" began telling racy stories to her children, her eyes glittering with merriment, till laughter ensued, in which mother and little ones fell together on the sofa in a heap, avoiding the floor for fear of making a noise for the professor. The merriment was infectious, and Zina laughed too, as she took leave of Mary Carruthers, whose efforts to rise were made impossible, in consequence of the little legs twined in inextricable confusion about her.

"Go on, tell us more, mammy, more," the voices were still imploring, as Miss Newbolt went her way, thinking that if Mrs. Carruthers could only write as she could talk with her one or two intimate friends or her own children, easily and brightly, her



work would have been worth a good deal more in the literary market. But Mary's play of mirth was will-o'-the-wispish; it needed the turn of the still pretty neck, and the flash of the merry eyes, to interpret it properly, and when she came to set it down on paper the iridescence was gone.

"There you see," she whispered, as she said goodbye to her friend "I have more than golden compensations in this dingy den where everything is so shabby," and she laughed again, parodying the litany of a brother of the pen, "From dulness and lowness of spirits; from brooding over fancied miseries, Good Lord deliver us."



## CHAPTER III.

### STEPHEN IS TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

"AND that selfish professor — who could not even work hard enough at his professorship to make it a monetary success—I have no patience with him for turning that true, sympathetic, and merry-hearted woman into the demure and decorous creature who figures in society, and who trembles when she tries to assert herself about the slightest thing, Oh how difficult it is for women who have to work for their bread, with this struggle for life becoming harder and harder—this highwater pressure driving poor humanity into all sorts of odd nooks and crevices for which it was never intended. I can never give Mary up whether my father likes her or not; I can do little enough for anyone that is of any use—and I mean to keep to her. Why are lots so unequally divided? And yet, she has one thing in her life which I have not—she has domestic love—love in the home surrounding her day and night. I wonder how it feels" mused the



girl, who had known nothing nearer to an embrace than the cold peck, night and morning, upon the cheek which she had to present to her father to salute. She could not help pondering over the inequalities in human lots as she got into her brougham, and told the coachman to drive her home to Chester-square. "Poor Mary is one of the women who would face starvation and even Death just to live for the sake of bringing up those children, and her husband—in spite of all his boasted learning—is as big a child as the rest."

The contrast between her own London home and that of the Carruthers struck her more forcibly than usual as she stood at the drawing-room window and surveyed the still luxuriant greenness of the foliage in the square outside, the white lace and rose-coloured blinds of the windows, the decorated walls, the Sèvres-china, the white and gold furniture, with Persian tiles in the fireplace, the brilliant colours of the petunias, the pelargoniums, lobelias, and calceolarias in the window-gardens, and the portfolio of engravings open on the table, with hand-painted copies from Florence of the most celebrated pictures by Botticelli, Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico and Andrea del Sarto.

To an unprejudiced observer, not so used to the luxuries of this world as Zina Newbolt had always been, it might have seemed like a Paradise though it was in the heart of London. But she only thought of Mary Carruthers, and pitied her for her meagre lot. She was not much accustomed to quote St. Paul, but it occurred to her at that moment to think how truly Paul had said that those who married should have trouble in the flesh. How could Mary tolerate the double annoyance of those noisy, teasing children, and the idle husband who so impressed her with his intellectual superiority? How could a woman so sensitive, so shrinking, and yet so



industrious, endure to have the coarse hands of the daily press laid upon her; how was it she could tolerate the brow-beating of publishers?

That evening the Newbolts had another gathering at their house.

"Can you give us a little music?" said one of the guests to his hostess in that interval after dinner when some of the people were tired of talking, or when those men who had talked and eaten till they were ready to yawn, were reclining on the lounges which were one of Zina Newbolt's secrets for making people comfortable.

"I am not accomplished," was Zina's answer.

"Except a thing could be excellent it had better not be attempted at all," was a rule of Stuart Newbolt's which had effectually damped his daughter's enthusiasms. "In the whole world," he was accustomed to say, "there was nothing more dreary and desolating than the domestic infliction which most people dignified by the name of 'a little music.'"

But the want had been anticipated; any hitch was rendered impossible in the arrangements. It was possibly for this reason, as cynics sometimes hinted, that Stephen Dewe was so much of an *habitué* in Mr. Newbolt's house. He was a young fellow clever in his generation, not only ready with neat retorts, playing from his own bat and imitating no one else, but never recalcitrant when asked to be obliging, ready to evoke deep and tender tones from the violin, or to play the piano with a delicacy and finish of touch and a dexterity of manipulation which made that instrument enjoyable.

If he were not a genius, he was at least a man of talent; the only question being whether he had the originality which would enable him to rise to a foremost place in the profession of music. One of the charms of his music was its thorough spontaneity. He had a fertility of improvisation, and



though the passages which he played would frequently recall similar passages in the works of Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, or Bach, he played them in his own fashion. Nothing could be more mysteriously melancholy than this improvisation, if Dewe was in the mood for melancholy, as he proved to be to-night.

One after another the guests fell off. A political lion, jolly, bluff, and middle-aged, who could not distinguish the Old Hundredth from Mendelssohn's Wedding March, suddenly found that his presence would be necessary in 'the House.' A caricaturist for one of the humorous papers, a stumpy young man with short cropped hair, ugly as one of his own caricatures, gazed for **some** time at the pianist and the hostess sitting by his side, with an owlish stare from eyes which seemed glazed with indifference, and then hurried home to jot down the lines, such as he could still remember, for one of his etchings. Pity that he was not a more celebrated painter, or the picture before him would have furnished a companion study to Dicksee's celebrated picture of 'Harmony.' The young man had fair hair, which clustered in short curls over his well-developed brow, an aquiline nose, and a complexion which, if it had not been constantly exposed to the action of sun and wind, might have been accused of effeminacy. This impression was corrected by the nervous strength of the athletic figure, whilst the dreamy, deep-set eyes again seemed to contradict in some strange way the idea conveyed by the muscular form, capable hands, and broad shoulders.

Nothing could have contrasted better with him than the graceful outlines of the woman, belonging altogether to another type. Her forehead was broad and low, but the arch of the eyebrows was vigorous, and beneath the strongly-marked brows



gleamed star-like eyes, with dark pupils encircled by irises in which tawny tints were blended with the brown. Her skin, olive by daylight, and ivory-tinted by candlelight, told of the passionate blood inherited from a foreign mother, whilst the bronze-gold of the hair, the depth of the eyes when in repose, the almost perfect line from the forehead to the nose, the full lips, the delicate nostrils, and the firm short chin were further indications of this mixed blood. "Unfathomable," Stephen Dewe had called those eyes, such an impassable sphinxlike look was there sometimes in the somewhat cold beauty of her face, when Zina Newbolt did not choose that others should pry into her affairs. But he had already learnt that they could flash in moments of excitement, and that, under the influence of music, tears could stand in them.

He chuckled secretly to himself when the other guests dropped out one by one, and when Stuart Newbolt, asserting the prerogative of his sixty summers, dropped into a doze in his armchair.

The last to take his leave was the old Canadian, who had been twice invited to the friendly board in consideration of his shortened stay in London. It mattered little to this good-natured egotist to have only himself for a listener, and he was meandering on in a sort of monologue whilst Dewe (who by this time was wandering into modern music) was interpreting one of Rubinstein's most delicious morsels.

Not content with enlarging on a dream of his own for guiding balloons in a novel way which had occurred to no one else, by throwing out ropes with anchors attached to them, he went on to tell the story of a 'cracked' friend who wrote to all the heads of the Governments in Europe to predict a terrific storm, foretelling that no ship could live at sea at a certain date. The storm had actually taken



place, though it had not been so bad as the prediction, and the cracked friend set to work to foretell another. "What is your secret?" the Canadian had asked. "Well," he answered, "if you won't tell anyone, it all turns upon the existence of an invisible moon." Then finding that his hostess was not listening, the owner of the Bardolph nose disappeared, making a sign that the sleeping occupant of the armchair, whose repose had become audible, was not to be disturbed.

"He would make a capital subject for your friend Mrs. Carruthers, who is always on the lookout for fresh types, and pitying herself because she has no longer the old-world models of Jane Austen, or the peasants of George Eliot to study from," said Dewe, waiting with his finger suspended over the keys. "I expect she is delighted with herself when she has unearthed something less stale than usual."

"To know Mary Carruthers you must know her in her own family. It is the sweet homeliness about her which makes her really lovable," answered Zina in the low tones in which they were accustomed to discourse to each other, when nobody else happened to be listening.

"I have no patience with the husband. Has she ever told you how he——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for Zina answered a little coldly, "She is not given to discussing her domestic affairs with me, even though I count myself amongst her intimate friends."

The young man did not answer that her friends made him jealous. He relieved himself instead by playing a melody of Grieg's. He played it softly and sympathetically; the harmonious chords appealing to her as no language could have done.

Then she added in a softened voice. "You meant to be kind and tolerant, but you were hurting me just now. I was ungrateful; I should have remem-



bered how you almost always fulfil your promise of helping me, and standing by my friends."

Once more he did not answer, but his hands still wandered over the keys of the piano. He knew that this apparently calm and self-contained woman was in reality very susceptible to emotional influences. He was no match for her in speech, but as she was catholic in her tastes, caring for Offenbach and Strauss, Schubert and Wagner, he had plenty of methods for adapting himself to her varying moods. He found his language in this music which could interpret the restless modern spirit or deal with the mysterious secrets of human life, expressing himself now in tender waiting chords, now in passionate appeals leaping like sparks of living fire from the instrument, and now in the scherzo with its Midsummer night's madness. Sometimes he played familiar 'bits,' but his interpretation of well-known passages was certainly original; and she could never admire it sufficiently as it brought out grand and wonderful new meanings. Apart from his art he might be comparatively weak, but when he discoursed to her in this fashion, he was powerful. Bitter grief, abiding joy--aye and a tender affection--the girl knew it--would be revealed to her with a glimpse of the hidden depths unsuspected in her own being, whenever he wielded the sorcerer's wand.

Suddenly he ceased to play, and began to sing in a subdued voice.

It was one of Jensen's songs, full of delicate, tender feeling. It had been chosen to interpret certain ideas, and it expressed the anguish of waiting like the cry of a spirit in despair. It was not only by intention that Dewe's voice was modulated to a low key, for in spite of his strength of frame he had little power of filling a room, and could seldom or ever be persuaded to sing in company. But what he missed in strength he more than supplied by



expression. It seemed to be less a voice than a soul in distress; he knew its influence over women.

When the last vibrating sound had died away, he glanced at Zina. Her face was turned away. He could only see the undercurve of the cheek, and the neck like the stalk of a lily.

But he knew that her eyes were moist, as they often were when these melodies were wandering over the strings of her heart, causing the high and low notes of her own nature to vibrate in sympathy.

"No one knows but you," she said, "how difficult things are for me at times," and he guessed from the agitated tone that the face which was turned away from him was bathed in tears.

"And if *I* know, why then will you not allow me to share these—difficulties?" said Dewe with his hands no longer on the piano, but strained tightly together, as he asked this question. "Am I to tell you for the hundredth time that I believe you would be happy with me?"

"Every man says that; every man promises us happiness, and ends by being tired of us—if not in weariness and disgust," she said passionately and almost scornfully, still hiding her tearful face, as she thought of the struggle for the mere necessities of existence which she had seen in Mrs. Carruthers' household, and reminded herself that she could never attempt to emulate that maternal unselfishness, and that she had been right, years before, in determining never to descend to the petty details which to so many married women were the essentials of existence.

"*You* can wait longer; but, by Heaven! *I* cannot. The coldness of perpetual analysis, and the weak affections which so often go hand in hand with intellectual force, will be all you will have left to you, if I do not try to rescue you. But I tell you I will sacrifice everything to the one task



of making you happy," cried the young man as he seized her hand and pressed it against his heart.

Before she had time to draw it away from him she uttered an astonished cry. Stephen Dewe turned his head, and saw that the man whom they had supposed to be sleeping was no longer reposing in his armchair. Neither of the two, who had been so keenly absorbed in their music, had thought of Stuart Newbolt for the last few minutes.

He must have slipped away from his comfortabled lounge and crossed the room when they were not looking. Possibly the siesta had been only a ruse. For the man who stood over them was no longer the self-contained man of the world, the somewhat apathetic Mæcenas, whose dominant idea was never to allow himself to degenerate into vulgar excitement. It was as if a mask had suddenly fallen from the Roman-like face, for fire flashed from his eyes, and his features were distorted not only with anger but with a sudden and violent rage.

"You forget it is growing late," he said sternly to his daughter, keeping his eye on her while she rose and went slowly towards the door, for she was overstrung and never dreamt of resisting his will.

Then finding himself alone with her lover he raved like one of unsound mind.



## CHAPTER IV.

### STUART NEWBOLT SPEAKS HIS MIND.

STEPHEN DEWE had been taken by surprise. He had spoken out though he had scarcely meant to do so. In a moment he had told Zina what was passing in his heart, though immediately afterwards he was inclined to blame himself for impulsiveness. He was of a high, fastidious spirit, liable to jealousy because it was sensitive, yet too proud to admit the jealousy even to itself. To see the woman he loved constantly surrounded by other men who admired her, to have a horror of the sort of influence to which she was continually subjected, and yet to submit patiently to the *rôle* of waiting for the crumbs of sympathy which she might choose to fling to him as to a faithful dog, was becoming odious to him. Years ago he had taken a vow against marriage, but he had set himself to save her from being one of those "book-worm sort of women," who according to him—a lover of painting and music—had no soft places in their hearts for chil-



dren, no tenderness for the weaknesses of their own sex, and no power of returning the affection of the men who loved them. He had secretly triumphed when he saw her softening under the influence of Mary Carruthers, but it was usual to him to reconnoitre the ground before he brought up his forces.

His heart leaped within him even at the thought of winning the woman, whom so many other men had failed to win, and whom he had watched develop from the girl, fragile and willowy in her teens, to the woman upright as a palm, superb, apparently reserved and somewhat cold to outsiders. He had not been sure that he approved her father's system of education, and yet for some years he had worshipped her as one of the "blessed Damosels," so long shut in behind the golden bars of their homes, and now sharing the educational advantages of their brothers.

Stuart Newbolt had perceived from the first that the reform in women's education was one which would go down to the roots of our social and domestic life. He had aimed at making his daughter ambitious, and had allowed her but one accomplishment, and that she had studied thoroughly at Rome and Florence, as well as in the Slade School in London. Whereas Stephen had covered yards and yards of canvas, and thrown up one art for another in disgust at his own futility, Zina Newbolt had toiled in silence and had little to shew as a result.

A friendship, which at first had been purely Platonic, had grown up by slow degrees between the woman who was now six-and-twenty, and the man who—looking younger than he was—had just entered his thirty-first year. That Zina should have encouraged him, seemed to her more calculating father one of those inexplicable riddles which the



unsolved mystery of a woman's nature is continually offering to the men who believe themselves to be experienced students of life. He blamed himself now for not having anticipated this terrible ending; he told himself he might have foreseen that when he attempted to reverse the proper order of things, Nature, outraged, would take her revenge. And the motherless daughter, debarred from the proper outlets for her affection; the daughter whom he had so moulded by his teaching that he intended her to combine the attractions of both sexes—the strength and reason of the man with the fascinations of the woman—had fallen into the snare of Titania, and become enamoured of an—*ass*. Something of this sort he said in his ravings, reproaching Dewe with being a dandy and a dilettante—a fool who had not even the manliness of a Bottom, but who prided himself on his yellow moustachios, his handsome face, and the devices of his tailor. He hinted with withering contempt that his daughter had made the same mistake which was made by so many men of sense, in imagining that beauty of mind must necessarily be allied to that of mere external form. He reminded the astonished suitor that society might be divided, as Goethe had divided it, into the strong men who lead it, the knaves who temporise, and the feeble hangers-on; and that he, Stephen Dewe—a fellow who had changed his profession from time to time and decided on nothing—was one of the feeblest of hangers-on. A hanger-on who had not even sufficient industry to succeed in the profession of music, but only knew how to make tender improvisings on the piano, to steal away a woman's heart.

The younger man's face was white as ashes, but he stood quite still, only moving once, to close the door behind him, while, statue-like, he listened to the angry torrent of words, never once removing



his eyes from Stuart Newbolt's face. These eyes, which were generally of a dreamy blue, had taken a deeper tint under the influence of emotion, and glittered like steel. He made no attempt to defend himself, and only once it crossed his mind to wish that the slight tyranny in Zina's manner—a manner which intoxicated him—had not come uppermost to his memory, bearing a faint resemblance to the overbearing savagery so suddenly revealed in her father. Love had exercised its usual power of exorcism—leaving little scope for any other passion—and, though in the midst of his astonishment he found himself wandering off into one of his speculations as to the very small differences which really existed between the civilised and uncivilised man, and the slight varnish supplied by the culture of generations, which was after all but the merest crust over the fire and smoke beneath it—he was tempted to no furious rejoinder.

Reserve was one of the qualities which he had in common with the woman he loved. And when Stuart Newbolt (making an attempt to repress the loud and harsh tones into which he, whose caprices were so seldom thwarted, had been betrayed to his own shame) demanded in the softer tones habitual to him on what grounds he dared to propose himself as a possible future husband for such a woman as Zina, he twice essayed to speak, and twice found that the words died away in his throat.

"Shall I ring for a glass of water?" asked his host, as he impatiently paced the room.

And still the curse of silence seemed to have fallen on Stephen. He was a man rather given to canvassing the possibilities of his future. Often and often had he canvassed his opportunities with Zina, and yet there had been nothing offensive or egotistical in his self-consciousness; he was rather inclined to run himself down, assessing the capital of his



mental stock at the lowest possible figure. No one knew better than he did that the gifts which lead to a greatness likely to be recognised by a man's contemporaries had not fallen to his share. Neither would his pride allow him to plead that he had a little private property, for—the introspective faculty being strong in his case—he was perfectly well aware that it was the possession of this private property which had proved his greatest snare. He only answered in a low tone, when at last he could control his voice,

“I believe you must have taken leave of your senses. I should be a coward to endure such violence from any other man, but for Zina's sake—”

He was interrupted once more.

“Don't mention that name,” said Stuart Newbolt with emphasis, as once more he turned and faced him. “You must never see my daughter again.”

His eyeballs were still injected with blood, but it struck Stephen at once that his manner had greatly changed. His voice had become once more low and distinct as he motioned Stephen to a chair, and sat down with something of his old dignity on another.

“You are right. I am not well, and this sudden discovery was too much for me. Let us discuss this thing calmly.” And then he said, with something of an unholy chuckle, laying his hand familiarly upon the other's shoulder, “I never before ventured to intrude upon such a delicate subject as your marriage. But let me give you some advice. I saw you paying attention the other day to that pretty little heiress, Laura Newton. The girl is head over ears in love with you; there will be no difficulty on *her* side. Now don't throw her over for a magnificent-looking person like my daughter, who will not have a penny from me if she marries *you*. Don't go forgetting Laura Newton—the other little girl—



she is your real triumph, and she is a lovely little creature, perfect whether in turquoise blue, or in porphyrian green, and ready to afford any number of toilettes."

Stephen winced at this chaffing tone. It suited Stuart Newbolt even less than his passionate rage, and the rapid alternation from one style of address to the other, without any "middle distance" to blend them together, was startling and bewildering.

The little heiress who could not succeed in hiding her infatuation for Stephen Dewe was fragile and delicate in constitution as in artistic tastes. Stephen's instinct was to defend her and protect her from her own weaknesses; but in a certain sense he despised her and could not bear to hear her compared to his goddess Egeria, the sight of whom might inspire a poet to make sonnets, an artist to paint pictures, or a musician to write music. All these varying forms of incense he had offered secretly at Zina's shrine, and he could not believe that Mr. Newbolt was as ignorant as he pretended to be of these years of devotion. He contented himself with moving his hand in a deprecating way, as in the same light mocking tone Stuart Newbolt continued—

"My daughter is another matter—are you not *afraid*? She is capable, for aught you know, of good or evil to any extent. A splendid match should be hers. For my own part the reason why I have so long consented to her remaining single is because I have not yet seen the man, titled or millionaire, whom I should consider to be good enough for her."

By this time the younger man realised that the 'chaff' was taking a form with which it would be difficult to contend. No open enemy was worse than a mocker. The beads of perspiration stood on his brow. He was not to be easily daunted, or



reasoned with, as if he were a child to be shaken out of a passing fancy. But there were times when Zina's father alarmed him—times when he was inclined to believe the strange stories which were afloat as to a sort of devilry in the family. What sort of man was this who seemed to enjoy giving swordthrusts and putting another into confusion by reminding him of his disabilities?

"It would be a pity if your talents were allowed to rust unused," sneered Newbolt, "but there are plenty of other people to appreciate them; they will enable you to occupy a creditable position as a drawing-room knight."

The flush deepened on Stephen's face. "Your daughter—" he began, but the words were taken out of his mouth.

"Allow me to hear of my daughter's feelings from her own lips; it is difficult for me to believe she has been more communicative to *you* than to me."

The perspiration again stood on the younger man's face. The difficulty of controlling himself was great, but he reminded himself that he had had his 'good time' for a few blissful seconds of that chequered evening. Yet the hide of the rhinoceros had seemed as if it would be a gift worth having, as he had faced the storm of shot with which he had been pounded since.

"If that is your last word I have only to wait," he said coldly as he rose to leave the room.

And then it was Stuart Newbolt's turn to lock himself in his study, and sink exhausted on the sofa. He had sent away the man, and he thought—with a repetition of the disagreeable chuckle which was by no means natural to him—of the bitter insults which he had forced him to swallow with writhing lips. But the woman had still to be dealt with and she had alarmed him lately.



## CHAPTER V.

### ZINA HAS IDEAS OF HER OWN.

STUART NEWBOLT had honestly believed that he was doing the best for his only child in educating her out of superstition and the weak womanly emotions which he had deliberately discouraged, bringing her up to secularism and what he called 'common-sense' from her infancy. Accomplishments were out of court, but his first cause for alarm had been in her early girlhood when he found that she was strongly moved by both music and painting; that the same emotional temperament which made her love the study of Shelley led her to condemn both Pope and Dryden, and that—later on—the pathos and finish of young Dewe's songs could stir her into emotion, and wake her into feelings of which—if her father could have moulded her completely—she never should have known the existence. Her ideals and enthusiasms were continually surprising him, and it was no comfort to him to be compelled to look upon them as a part of the hereditary weakness of her



emotional womanhood. He made excuses for her; but there were times when in spite of her dignified manners, and proud reserve amongst strangers, he thought her wanting in judgment.

Her obstinacy had vexed him more than once lately; as when in her liking for Mary Carruthers, and her determination in choosing her for her most intimate friend, she had given one of the first signs of an independent will, and of the struggle which might be waged in the future between his own determination and that of an originally fine and fervid nature which had more or less taken the impress of his.

She had from the first taken a violent fancy to a woman whose life seemed to be led on quite another plane of existence from that of all the other people whom she was accustomed to meet. Mary was like a dweller in another planet. She had talked a little sadly during their last interview, but in reality the quaint motherly woman was singularly free from that curse of the century, that habit of melancholy rhapsody which she left to the professor. She refused to look long on the dark side of things.

"I take it all *higher*," as she once said mysteriously to Zina. "If one pretends to be a Christian one must not be over-careful, and then it is astonishing the openings which come in answer to prayer?"

Miss Newbolt had smiled a little patronisingly; she thought of quoting Huxley, and then desisted. This new experience of a woman making herself happy when she had only—as Zina phrased it—"twopence in her pocket," was piquant and original, and so was the thought of a helpless little body like Mary fighting so hard to wrest fortune and happiness for those whom she loved.

Nothing had persuaded Zina to abandon her friend, not even her father's sneers. In vain had he quoted Dr. Johnson, who never wished to meet a fool in



Heaven, adding drily that "the majority of people who thought themselves safe for it were fools, and Mrs. Carruthers as great a fool as the rest." She had only vehemently defended Mary from the sweeping aspersion of foolishness.

So long as the purveyor for the "Family Sympathiser" had not appeared at any of Stuart Newbolt's dinner-parties—to which, as he explained, he might admit a few lions, but no jackals or hyenas, and certainly no donkeys—he had managed to treat his daughter's friendship for Mrs. Carruthers as a matter of supreme indifference. Still that friendship was somewhat ominous as betokening a weakness of sex. A straw might show in which way the wind sat, and it would be painful if Zina's tastes, which were generally good, should betoken the inconsistency which he considered to be characteristic of women.

It was possible she might show the same obstinate determination in the case of this musician.

An eager desire to know the worst and settle the question once for all tormented Stuart Newbolt when he determined, before he slept that night, to summon his daughter and let her know that he wished this acquaintance to be discontinued. He had thought it possible he should have to argue with her, but he had not counted on the steady temerity of her opposition. Seating herself on one of the easiest chairs, and leaning back against the soft cushions, with no signs of agitation or of haste, she asserted her intention of never giving up Stephen Dewe.

"You need not trouble yourself to be annoyed about it—we can wait—I am in no hurry to be married," she said in her melodious voice, even ending with a little laugh.

Her character inclined to gratitude, and she had no intention of vexing her father. To live her life as she was living it, with all the resources of wealth



at her command—wealth which did not bore her—to have just the amount of amusement which she enjoyed, to associate occasionally with people of world-wide reputation, and to keep Stephen as a delightful accessory to the other pleasures of existence, without any thought of separating herself from her father—apparently this was her programme.

It seemed to Stuart Newbolt childish and weak. He lost his patience as he had lost it before.

“Anyone might infer from your attitude that you were absurdly in *love* with this apology for a man,” he said in his most sarcastic tones,” but how often have I told you what it means to be in love. It means to make a fool of yourself—to expect things from life which you cannot possibly get—Take the experiences of nineteen out of every twenty girls who marry for what they call—*love*. Expect nothing, and be properly matter of fact—treat marriage like every other business contract—and you will save yourself from heart-rendings and despair—the lot of most sentimental weaklings, who lay up for themselves a heritage of disgust and wretchedness.”

She did not answer. There seemed to be nothing for her to say, and she was evidently determined not to be drawn into a discussion.

Her silence and something in the expression of her face irritated him. “If you think I am to be turned from my resolution by the foolish caprice of a woman, you are mistaken,” he cried with an oath, dashing his hand on the table before him with such vehemence that a delicate specimen of Viennese china fell on the parquet floor, and broke into fragments.

Zina rose, and made as if she would have picked up some of the largest pieces. Then—as if she had changed her purpose, she advanced slowly towards him, and looked straight into his eyes. Her own were dark almost to blackness, and there was



something in their expression which made him recognise how he had broken in that moment of fury something more valuable than the Viennese vase.

"The vase can be put together with china cement and will be almost as valuable to the dealers, it would be a good thing if other fractures were always as easily mended" she remarked in her coldest way, "let us bid each other good night."

The tone was no longer filial; it was imperative as his own. He had heard her use it once or twice in her life when some young suppliant for her favour had to be put in his proper place, or when some fulsome compliment from another had roused her indignation. On those occasions he had admired her for it, wondering a little at the stateliness into which she had grown, but feeling amused by her queenly graciousness, for she had spoken in her usual quiet way and dismissed them in a manner which was almost friendly. Did she think *he* was to be patronised in the same regal fashion?—he who was used to rule everyone, but who had always guessed that the time might come when their wills would be in collision. Stuart Newbolt felt at that moment as if he had foreknown the interview, or as if it had taken place in some previous state of existence, so familiar did it seem to him with all its details. He had called Dewe an ass, but he saw now that *he* had been the fool in not perceiving the incongruity between the actual and potential position occupied in his house by this queenly woman. Had he not educated her himself to be his match in philosophy and logic; had he not rejoiced when he had found her ready to reason that if her father made researches it should be a part of her duty to keep up with them, that she might never be behind in filial sympathies?

She was a bit of a genius and he had sometimes



comforted himself by the thought of the immeasurable distance there would be between her and the ordinary young men she met in society. She was unfortunately something of a *femme incomprise*; but was it possible that she had also her distinct individuality, and had he been wrong when he prided himself on her freedom from sentimental maladies?

"Father," she repeated, in that chilling voice which she had sometimes used when she had wished to keep up her own dignity, "let us understand each other once for all before we part, and then we will not allude to this subject again. I am in no hurry to be married, but, sooner or later, I *mean* to marry—Stephen Dewe."

For a minute or two they regarded each other in silence.

He, too, had the blankest stare for the people whom he meant to cut, but this stare in no wise affected his daughter. He failed to control her with the power of his eye. His heart began beating as Dewe's had beaten a few minutes before, but he was used to managing women, and smiled ironically.

"You say that you have made up your mind," he responded with that smile; "do you not think it possible that I may make up mine also?" The exasperating influence of her words, her looks, and her tones were by degrees breaking down that self-control on which he prided himself. He betrayed himself by the unwonted flushing of his face, and by the unusual touch of asperity in his irony as he added, "I might have known that you had some idealistic prospect, when you refused offer after offer, and declared your intention of remaining with your father—always *that* with you women, you know—some pet little castle in the air, with no foundation in reality!"

"And what is *your* prospect for me, ask yourself—if you wish me to argue like a reasonable being.



You do not look on to the end. Ask yourself if the rich or successful man whom you would wish me to marry despite want of love on my part, would not learn to hate me, or if I should not learn to hate him, and if that would be the successful climax, as it is of so many marriages in respectable and fashionable London?"

The beating of his heart was becoming alarming; it suggested the possibility of physical disease. Years before, a doctor had warned him that mental excitement might be disastrous in his case.

It was important to end the interview.

"What is the use," he said, with a deprecating smile, "of putting yourself in a towering passion instead of being thankful—for having escaped a danger—a danger which was becoming a serious one? Theory may do very well for you; action fortunately, rests with me; and from this day I shall forbid young Dewe my house."

He had saved his dignity, and she had also saved hers, as she left the room with a grace which few women could have equalled. There was an eloquence in the poise of her head and in every line of her back, which he could not help admiring, as he characteristically compared it to that of Sarah Bernhardt, or of Ristori in her young days, when she had been at her best. There was more remonstrance in his daughter's movements as she silently left the room than there would have been in rude unmeaning speech.

He caught himself thinking of the limitations of human language, and of the abysses of solitariness between himself and this his nearest and dearest relation—abysses not to be bridged over by words—whilst that musician fellow had probably a means of communicating with her which could find out the more sensitive places in her nature. What madness to have allowed him this means of communication,



giving him the pull over himself, for years which could never be recalled! Who could tell how far the mischief might have gone? The furniture of the room swam before his eyes, and he sank again exhausted into his arm-chair.

He was of a nature thoroughly to enjoy his existence, and it required some great and startling blow like the present to rouse him into consideration. His tendency was to let his affairs drift on as they might, trusting that nothing would go very wrong or so wrong that an energetic effort could not remedy them at last. He could never have given utterance to Metternich's reflection that after him the deluge might come, but he always had a vague impression that such might be the case. It seemed, however, now, that the deluge might come at once, and he perceived the necessity for rallying his powers to meet it.



## CHAPTER VI.

### A SUDDEN ILLNESS.

ON the next day Stuart Newbolt was ailing, and his illness seemed to put his daughter seriously in the wrong. He had realised for the first time that when she had made up her mind on a subject she was not at all likely to give way, and it even occurred to him as possible that she might have also inherited strong temper from him, as well as a will which was unbending as iron. The subject of heredity became perplexing, not to say mortifying, when viewed in this fashion. That a woman, whom he had moulded and whom he had always hoped to dominate by his own personality, should have this force and fire about her was altogether annoying. He felt he had a right to be angry with her.

He had been so long accustomed to be the only person to be considered, that he had the appearance of pardoning her even when he made her suffer.

"Yes, I am altogether out of sorts," he said, when he returned in the afternoon earlier than usual



from his club, and it was impossible for her not to be struck by his extraordinary pallor, or not to be alarmed when she saw that he shivered as though under the influence of fever.

He refused to summon medical aid, but did not interfere with her when she insisted on putting off the guests who had been invited for the following week. In the *tête-à-têtes* which ensued, it struck her more forcibly than it had done before, that he insisted on treating her as if she were a girl—a big child—and that the intercourse between them was of a very curious kind indeed.

Her womanly intuition was no longer at fault; it read the true meaning of the selfish interdict and threw a new light on a position which was one of subjugation, making her revolt from the idea of wearing a yoke. She had spoken out once for all, but she determined to say no more. A sense of filial duty restrained her from making things uncomfortable now that her father was not well. But she no longer smiled or bubbled over with quiet mirth, when her father made his dry and somewhat cynical jokes, and he—in his turn—ceased to compliment her on her pertinent ideas, and opportune answers.

In his secret heart he accused her of not being at all amusing, and resented the fact that her accustomed reticence subsided at last into absolute silence.

The old habit of bowing to his authority remained, and this habit was so strong that the utmost resolution she could summon ended in an acknowledgment of the impossibility of acting openly against him.

She said to herself, "His opposition may keep me unmarried as long as it is my duty to remain with him, but he can never force me to marry anyone else."

In accordance with this resolution she had written



to Stephen Dewe swearing faithfulness, but no one knew better than she did how oddly her letter must read. "I shall love you always, always—as long as life can last, and afterwards if I can—if there is any future in which we can meet." Yet what was it she could promise—the faint chance of meeting again in an indefinite future?

Was there any woman in whom she could confide? She thought of Mary Carruthers, but Mary had her own burdens, and she would inflict no more upon her. Her father had bidden her to select Eva Capern as her greatest friend. But though Eva prided herself on her conversational aplomb, and was never easily worsted in society, capping the men's remarks with sharp little sayings of her own, no one knew better than Zina how poor and how shallow were her counsels to those of her own sex. Eva, for all her appearance of youth, was a couple of years the elder of the two, and prided herself on her thorough emancipation when, a short time before, she had married a man who seldom interfered with her, and who had both riches and reputation. It had been a joke between the two women that she would make a capital *chaperon* for her guardian's daughter when she was married. And Eva, who dearly loved a position of importance, and who had some fancied scores to pay off in the past, had already assumed the patronising airs of a somewhat jaunty matronhood.

Could it be possible to tell *her*? Did not Zina know already, that weeks ago her anger had nearly suffocated her when she had but a slight suspicion of the actual fact? No, her heart told her she had no ally, but possibly an enemy, in Eva Capern, whose suspicions were to be eluded, and whose observations were to be drawn away from the dangerous track. The best hope would be that Mrs. Capern had forgotten all about the supposed



imprudence, and that her thoughts would be engrossed with her own affairs.

Meanwhile, day by day, Zina wrestled not only with her loneliness but with an all-abiding pain. She determined not to be conquered by it. If the world was ruled by two masters, pain and pleasure, she saw no reason why she should be worsted by the first. She fought the battle with her natural despondency.

"If you are determined not to think of a thing, you do not," she said to herself, with a desperate resolution to fall back on prose, and not to surrender the citadel of her heart to the false-poetic.

She was not one of the people who could drift with circumstances or allow fate to decide for her. She had learnt from Mary Carruthers to ask always "What is right to do?" From Mary too, she had learnt to try to conquer the habit of allowing herself to become restless or brooding—a habit to which she was inclined by nature.

Just now she would not allow herself to look on to the future, or to think that her ideal of a perfect life would be shadowed, if, after all, she should be called upon to relinquish the hope of a great passion, and to look upon her existence as a compromise. Perhaps when the years passed on Stephen Dewe would forget her, or would cease to care, and she utterly refused to let herself think of the blank which life might be to her if he did not care.

She had tried to be always on the alert, keen to perceive her duty, and to act up to it, and she had much to do now when her father was out of sorts, and when the irritability of illness prevented him from being like his usual self. He had evidently much to say to her, but the reserve which he had always maintained about his private affairs prevented him from giving scope to his feelings, or



relieving his mind of something which seemed to weigh upon it. There were days when he was wretchedly low, or when he would talk bitterly, as she had never heard him talk before. Sometimes he would get up and leave the room as if he wished to be alone, at others he would take up a book and never turn the pages of it; or gaze straight in front of him, with a frown which she had never seen before on his forehead.

At such times she would wait upon him with the most devoted attention, half irritated with him and half vexed with herself when she saw his brow drawn together, and shrank from the resentful antagonism of his face; trying to persuade herself that there was no diminution of her loyalty to him, though that which had happened had made their companionship joyless.

But now and then a strange idea was gaining on her in spite of herself—that there was not an inch of common ground between them. The altruism at which she aimed was difficult to live up to; she demanded too high a standard from others as well as herself; and there were times when the faults of others distressed her, and she found it difficult to forgive them.

The difference of temperament, which is so much worse than any difference of opinion, had always existed as a fatal barrier between herself and her father, making her shy and reticent; but it seemed to be only lately that she was conscious of an aversion, not so much to the man himself, as to his modes of thinking, his moods and habits.

The doctors were summoned at last, and discoursed much of the vibrations of the nerves, and of the palpitations of the heart. But their discourses did not seem to throw much light upon the matter. And Zina, in her nervous mood, shrank from the apartment in which her father sat, immovable, like



a carved idol set up in the middle of the room to be worshipped, a fetish which did not take the trouble to turn its head. She began by degrees to have a horror of the room with its pictures, books, statues, and china, and to feel that there was something magnificent and solemn, but almost uncanny in the spectacle of this figure—with its grey and luminous eyes, which were the only sign of life about it—not rising, but indicating its wants with its finger.

And by degrees her bravery flagged. Naturally religious and denied the proper outlets for religion, she was afraid of becoming superstitious. Powers inimical seemed to be around her. She was conscious of them, they weighed upon her.

She was haunted by the idea, vague but importunate, that her father had a sense of property in her, and that it was less on account of any love he might feel for her than on account of this feeling of proprietorship, that he was so loath, during the days of his illness, to let her out of his sight. He prided himself on the fact that he had taught her to think, and now she seemed to be haunted by the malady of thought. "It is thought, and thought only, which distinguishes human beings from brutes, and creates the barriers between right and wrong," he had often said to her.

But in the days of her confinement to the sick room she did not find herself able to pick and choose her thoughts. When alone in her own apartment she would walk up and down, up and down, thinking and thinking till her head seemed to go round.

Stephen Dewe had written again to her, reproaching her for her too ready submission to her father's wishes. But she had nothing to answer to Stephen. Her ideas of marriage were not the ideas of an untrained girl; her acquaintance with literature,



and her honesty in dealing with herself, forbade her to entertain the thought of battling with a poverty which her tastes and her training had by no means fitted her to bear. She could not answer her lover in his own vein.



## CHAPTER VII.

### UNEXPECTED GOSSIP.

THE next few weeks were passed in a state of vexed discomfort, against which Zina struggled feebly, with a vague craving **and** restlessness which had been before unknown **to her**.

There were days when Stuart Newbolt seemed to be a little better, but few and fewer confidences passed between him and his daughter. Sometimes for an hour or two he would bury himself in his papers, but the examination of these documents only served to make him more irritable. Doubts and perplexities generally assailed him in the twilight hour, and at this time his nervous suspicions would be visited upon Zina. All this exhibition of pessimism was so new in the man that the daughter was startled by it, her own dread of being repulsed making it more and more difficult for her to speak her mind openly to him. Stephen continued to write, his tone being naturally one of complaint, and Zina—quick to reproach herself—accused herself of behaving not



quite honourably to him. It would have been perhaps better and fairer, she told herself, in her depression, to have dismissed his suit altogether, leaving no element of uncertainty in his life.

Her reticence did not please the invalid. "I don't want a woman in extremes—either a dunce or a blue-stockings," he had been wont to say complainingly; "and girls are always in extremes. You are no exception to the rule. When I want to be amused, you are cold as marble."

And she did not answer him according to his humour. She was not like most women, finding her ready relief in letting off a stream of angry words; she was chary of the reckless speech which some use as a safety valve.

If only she could have been let alone without interference from meddlesome outsiders! But Eva Capern, whose earthly ideas formed a powerful counterpoise to her attractions, was constantly flitting backwards and forwards to the house, deluging her with questions, or making suggestions which only increased her perplexity. Mrs. Capern, from whom Zina shrank, had found it amusing enough to act as adviser to her guardian's daughter, whose style of beauty formed a remarkable contrast to her own. But the two had never been friends, and the worldly little chaperon had been ready, from the first, to complain that Zina never seemed to be properly touched by the admiration of others, but treated it as if she had had too much of it, and as if it worried and annoyed her.

Her complaints now were that Zina was wasting her time in securing one of the most brilliant matches of the season, and that she had already refused the most eligible *partis*. "You know it is nonsense for you to talk, but you cannot go unmarried for *ever*, and now you are losing your opportunities as you always do lose them. Only the other day Sir James



Maddox was inquiring anxiously about you. I know that he has left his card half-a-dozen times at the house, but all that makes no difference to you—you strange girl. I believe you never even see your cards."

Zina did not hear her. Experience had taught her not to discuss these questions with Eva. Marriage without love seemed to her a profanation, but more than once when she had tried to say so, sharp altercation had followed. She was occupied with her own thoughts, but the expression of her face was tragic, and contrasted strangely with her usual composure of manner.

"You are always in a brown-study, and I don't understand," Mrs. Capern went on excitedly, "however you can immure yourself like this, losing your complexion in a sick-room: your father is the last man to require such a sacrifice; he has too much common-sense, and he spoke to me before his illness about this very subject of Sir James Maddox. It is not a question of very serious illness; you have a trained nurse already, and why should you continue to play the part of a nurse? You are not fitted for it. You bury yourself, shut yourself up in the dark, and then wonder that you are sad. You must rouse yourself, you always *did* need to rouse yourself."

There was a shrillness in her tone which made the other woman look up with a start. "I think it is my father who requires to be roused, like the poor creature in 'Dombey & Son'," she said, dashing wildly away from the unwelcome subject of her prospects in marriage, thankful that she had been able to keep her secret to herself, and that Mrs. Capern knew nothing of the late episode with the objectionable Stephen Dewe. "My father makes me anxious. I will try to recollect the *sine quâ non*—that he must be *roused*."

"I am sure you have nothing to complain



of with such a brilliant future before you, if only you knew how to make the best of it," continued Mrs. Capern, unbuttoning her long gloves as if she intended to make a further stay in a house which she considered to be almost her own. "Your father will soon be well; everyone is seedy at times—but, thank Heaven, he will soon be well enough to exert his authority, and to look after his own interests, which seem to me to need it terribly. Everyone takes advantage when a man, who is as popular as he is, is lain aside." Zina raised her head and looked at her.

The answering look was altogether so light-hearted that one might have supposed there was no such thing as a real sorrow in the world to see the pleasant self-assurance of this butterfly of fashion. But her pleasantries were felt to be unseasonable just then, and Zina replied coldly, with a haughtiness which was characteristic, "I have made up my mind never to obey any arbitrary injunctions from my father or anyone else, and this is a question which, as I have told you a thousand times, I refuse to discuss with anyone."

"Don't you be bitter. What do you know about it?" queried Mrs. Capern, with a persistence which showed a grim absence of tact as she brought her back to the point; "it seems to me you are perfectly demented. If you have told me this a thousand times, how often have I told *you* that I utterly despise that idiotic class of women which insists on ignoring plain facts which are straight before their eyes. Now you have got to live in the world, and have everything as you have been used to it—everything of the *best*—you know everyone likes the best—and the question is, *how* you will live in it, if all the things they say are true, by-and-by?"

She nodded as if to emphasize her question, and gazed impatiently at Zina, who still sat motionless, with her arms crossed before her, wondering on the



one hand at the sort of daring which made discomfiture, and all attempts at arresting conversation, utterly impossible in Eva's case; perplexed on the other by what seemed to be the extraordinary irrelevance of the question.

She turned her beautiful eyes inquiringly upon Mrs. Capern, who answered comically, and almost childishly, "Now do not make the worst of it. Oh, I give you my solemn assurance that I have nothing to do with it; but since your father has been ill the gossips do not hesitate to circulate the most odious scandals at his expense. Of course they are all pure fabrications, and I don't believe a word of them, but they have rummaged up a lot of cock-and-a-bull tales about his youth, and say that he has eaten up his fortune and is loaded with debt. Some of them do not hesitate to add that he is shamming illness, and that the key of the whole domestic situation is that he wishes to marry his daughter to some old fellow who has millions—a Jew, I think they say—and that the daughter is refractory. Now you have the whole of it."

Zina looked at her with her eyes flashing; there was a hardness in her face, and she was positively trembling. "Oh, I would rather die," she said "than live on the low level of lives like these! Lives which are spent in retailing the most foolish pieces of gossip—not only foolish, but abominable, and to be treated with contempt."

"If I could see him and watch him for myself—look into his eyes with my own—I should be able to tell whether it were quite such foolish gossip," the other woman was thinking to herself. "Thank Heaven he has nothing more to do with *my* affairs."

But though Eva's visits were of daily occurrence she was never allowed to see the invalid, whose nervous illness was always aggravated by the presence of any intruder.



"Mind, I do not vouch for the truth of anything I hear, but I thought you would like to be told," she said, as she tripped away, rather satisfied than otherwise with the results of her own diplomacy in supplying Zina with a reasonable motive for encouraging the attentions of Sir James Maddox — in case, as she put it, that anything should happen to her father.

And Zina, who had been used in the old days to these skirmishes between herself and her father's ward, remained in future exasperatingly quiet, in spite of the desperate attempts made to shake her resolution.

She had always resented the fashion in which Mrs. Capern—generally clever enough to hit on congenial subjects in her guardian's presence—threw off the mask at once when alone with his daughter.

"She does not really care for him; it seems to me that no one cares for him, and I myself have been disloyal," thought Zina with a new tendency to self-reproach.

After all, considering that Eva's visits were so constant, it did not do to take to heart the ridiculous things she said. Yet **her** guardian had been good to her, he had always been partial to her, and in the days before her marriage he had ever been careful of her interests, and Zina, in her just indignation, wondered how she could stoop to listen to those who did not hesitate to vilify and blacken his character.

The gossip should be nothing to *her*, she told herself as she returned to her father's couch, reminding herself of the tragedy in so many lives—of happiness wrecked not by great things, but by small suspicions and small collisions of will, and determining that it should never be so in hers.

And yet as she watched by him when he slept, little things which she had almost forgotten returned to her unwilling memory—how someone had told her that at the age of twenty her father had gambled



away his small inheritance at Monte Carlo, and how, after a sleepless night during which he had first of all made up his mind to blow out his brains, he had re-appeared in the gaming room and won again more than he had lost.

And then there was that story of his marriage—Zina's own name corroborated that tale—how he had met her mother abroad, a beautiful orphan child, some said of Russian, and others of Polish extraction; and how he had placed her in an English school, and educated her himself with a view to marrying her when she should be of suitable age. She was said to have been good and sweet-tempered as well as beautiful; but Zina was not ignorant of the gossip which asserted that her father had first seen her mother begging her bread at the roadside; and that when he found it impossible for her, after the slight education he had given her, to shine in cultivated society, he afterwards maltreated her.

Zina could herself remember some stormy scenes in her childhood, and could believe that her father's thirst for distinction, and his desire for personal aggrandizement, might have caused him to treat her mother with cruelty. If so, such behaviour would be difficult to forgive.

Hitherto she had been too filial, with her sense of kinship too strong to allow her to put anything but the best construction on these episodes of the past; but now, for the just time, she was ready to assume that her mother had been treated with unkindness and neglect. She had often before had a doubt of her father's judgment, but till now she had never been pre-disposed to think him in the wrong. Doubtless, she said to herself, in those scenes which she remembered in her childhood, he had been always in the wrong.

The thought steeled her heart against him. The



attempt to gloss over the difficulty which she was conscious of feeling, and to simulate indifference, roughened her voice. She stopped with a little cough to clear her throat, more than once when she was in close attendance on her father.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### MORBID FEARS.

STUART NEWBOLT'S illness increased. The doctors did not as yet pronounce it dangerous, but there were times when nursing him and seeing him suffer affected Zina painfully, and when his spasms of agony were repeated in her face.

She lived through the next few days in a sort of nightmare, suffering mentally as well as bodily. There were occasions when she seemed no longer to think, only to feel—with variable moods like the shifting sky—when all her good resolutions were put to flight, and when she blamed herself for her fervid temperament, trying not to let herself be borne along by the emotion of the moment. Emotion, as she knew, did not produce action; experience had taught her the distinction. But she was sorely in need of a helper. After a time even Mrs. Capern had ceased to come, and though Zina hated her worldly insinuations and trivial gossip, wincing at the accusations so easily made by one who was



sharp-witted as well as sharp-tongued, yet the loneliness was not good.

One night, when her spirits had begun to rise because the bulletin which the doctors had issued was, "a little better," she began to think she might take a longer interval of sleep, lying down in a room close to the invalid's. But towards the morning she was roused by the sound of angry speech in the adjoining room. The sick man's voice was raised, loud and angry, but the nurse's tones were lower, pleading, and a little frightened. Zina was on her feet in a moment, to find her father in a state of half-delirium, making violent accusations of the nurse—accusations which were now bordering upon rage, and now subsiding into tones of querulous complaint. It seemed that the poor woman had taken advantage of the lonely hours of the night to discourse with him on his spiritual state, and to urge on him the necessity for seeing a priest. His excitement, almost bordering upon frenzy, was out of all proportion to the unintentional offence. He declared that he would have no more nurses: they were all in league with the Jesuits, who were death to the progress of any nation; he said he would like to have all the hypocritical priests strung up in a row like the malefactors they were; and he declared that the poor innocent-minded, sermonising nurse was the colourless, negative tool of these creatures, thinking herself safe for the kingdom of heaven.

The servants, used to these "nervous attacks," as they called them, in their master's case, crowded round him, and it was difficult to prevent him, in his present delirious condition, from warning them to have nothing to do with the dull ascetic religion which retarded the world's progress and led men back into bondage.

It was necessary, as the doctor said when he was sent for, to "clear the decks," and then Stuart New-



bolt would have no one near him but his daughter—the nurse, angry and hurt, insisting on remaining, but cowering away from him in a corner of the room.

Zina was vexed and ashamed. It had been such a comfort to have a trained nurse; till one had come she had felt so horribly incompetent. And, although the woman had naturally a sense of her own importance and this episode had shaken the girl's confidence in her judgment, there was no need to quarrel with her, or to doubt her efficiency.

Still she knew how hopeless it would be to cross her father. It was necessary to take the onus of the situation on herself, knowing, as she did so, that the compromise which she proposed must sound inconsistent and tyrannical to the outraged woman's ears, if it were not altogether contrary to her printed rules.

“Nurse—I hope you will not misunderstand—but I think I had better *seem* to take the nursing into my own hands—just for the present—to humour him—especially at nights—” she said in apology.

There was nothing else to be done, for the nurse was unwilling to be sent back to the Home, and the patient—who was still sitting up in his bed, the beads of sweat standing on his forehead, and his face convulsed with anger—became still more excited whenever the question was debated of whether a second nurse should be summoned from the institution. For the first time it occurred to his daughter that possibly there was a strain of madness in these fits of temper.

The thought was a terrible one, but it was the only hypothesis which seemed adequately to explain those other scenes which she looked back upon in her childhood. Better, if so, that this illness should end fatally than that he should linger to be a curse to himself and others, with that taint of madness increasing, and an awful future in store for him.



She tried to reason herself out of the idea, and to comfort herself with the thought that she would rather have to deal with an irritable man of this sort who cared enough for his fellow-creatures to vent his choler on them, than with the cold impersonal statue which she had tended lately. But the morbidity engendered by a too close attendance in the sick-room was already gaining on her, when it struck her that *she* too must have inherited the violent temper, and that the feeling of resentment with which she had waited upon him at the commencement of his illness had been unamiable, if not altogether unnatural.

"We cannot either of us plead our natural goodness as an excuse for dispensing with the assistance of a priest," she thought with a little sigh, as she made another effort of will to put these distracting fancies on one side; and set to work in a practical matter-of-fact way to collect the tumblers and plates which had accumulated in the room.

"These had better go down," she said quietly to one of the maids, and then as the nurse stared on, crestfallen and offended, she tried to explain:

"To-morrow we shall be able to talk it over—perhaps we shall then be able to send for some one else, but if you prefer to stay you can do so—meanwhile I am here to help, and you can tell me what there is to do."

"But," gasped the discomfited nurse, "if anything should go wrong with my case—if the doctors should blame *me*—"

"Oh you need not be afraid—nothing will go wrong—and you must be sorely in need of rest. *I* have had my sleep—*I* shall be able to go on," said Zina, the awkwardness of the situation making her voice strained and cold.

There was no time for her to explain further, and there was nothing to show that her sympathies were all with the aggrieved woman, who resented the



manner in which she had been treated and was inclined to impute the worst motives to every member of the heathenish family.

Finally the matter was settled, but not for Zina's happiness. It was no comfort to be installed in a difficult post, with the sense that the nurse was inclined to be aggressive, and that her eyes were often fixed on her with a resentful meaning which aggravated her nervousness.



## CHAPTER IX.

### OVER - WROUGHT.

IT was an uncomfortable state of things, but one which could not be avoided. It was but natural that the nurse—who from this time felt as if she had lost the glory of the case which had been entrusted to her—should be angry and jealous; but her feeling of animosity would have been lessened if she could have guessed how the daughter of the house was shrinking from her task. Zina was too highly-strung and too impressionable for the fatigue and responsibility, and yet she had been wont to pride herself on her physical strength.

Whenever she flagged, or whenever the doctor pleaded with her not to over-exert herself, he found her deaf to reason, nerving herself to do her duty.

After all she was compelled to recognise the truth of Eva's words—that she was not one of those women who have a faculty for nursing, and who have a sort of enjoyment in patient endurance, and self-denying pleasures.



The long confinement in the sick-room, and the days which she had spent in solitude—unconsciously chafing and irritating her wound—were beginning to tell on a nervous system always sensitive, and upon feelings which were exceptionally acute. The vivacity of her imagination, ever ready to create scenes for her which were not real, was now equally ready to conjure up morbid illusions. At one time she would be flagellant of herself, calling herself unnatural for having brooded over her wrongs, or for having made much of that little drama in which her insurgency had played so important a part. She would tell herself that it was her revolt against parental authority, and her unnatural defiance which had led to the retribution of this serious illness. At such times she would reproach herself for her habit of resting with pleasure on the one bright spot in the present darkness—the thought of her young lover's devotion. It seemed to her a sort of treachery to allow herself to think, "By and bye, when I am no longer bound by my duty to my father, I shall be able to marry Stephen Dewe."

She was ashamed of the feeling of hidden joy at the bottom of her heart and the sudden lightening of her trouble whenever she thought of the future.

Her very horror of the dark thing which seemed to be hovering in the house tormented her with sensational nervousness—a nervousness aggravated by the knowledge that the death of her father would set her free to marry the man, to whom she had plighted her troth.

In some curious metaphysical controversies in which Stuart Newbolt's friends had taken part—controversies which had acted unfortunately on a girl of her imaginative nature, she had heard much of irresistible impulses and had once herself joined in a discussion as to whether in the depths of each of



us there might not be lurking more selves than one, whose shifting equilibrium might constitute the real self.

In her present state of mental welfare—a state of tension and excitement resulting from the internal conflict of the last few weeks, she was thinking in a terrified way of thwarted tendencies which might revenge themselves on the better ones.

Later on, she blamed herself for not having sent for Mary Carruthers, but it was impossible just then to make a confidante of anyone. Probably the “breadwinner of the Carruthers’ family” did not know the full extent of Mr. Newbolt’s illness, and the little woman had always been fearful of intruding on the magnificence of Chester-Square, whilst Zina, humouring her fancy, had made a rule of visiting her in the ugly lodgings which were so inexpressibly florid in their decoration.

It was unfortunate; for Mary with her plain common-sense, and strong faith in the Unseen would have been able to help the girl, who had a strange yearning after the Christian ideal, and hated herself for the evil thoughts which seemed to hold carnival within her during those silent hours in the lonely nights when she was forced to take her turn at the nursing—crouching in the arm-chair as if she were famished for warmth, and looking at the sleeping man with a spiritless, nerveless, dejected, and almost purposeless gaze. Hateful and distressing thoughts they were, in which, for the first time, it was suggested to her that an engagement prolonged indefinitely would probably be never fulfilled, and that such a prolonged engagement would be a drag on any man, rather likely to hinder him than to promote his success in life. Stephen had continued to write to her in a passionate, feverish strain, blaming himself on the one hand for the want of self-control which had led him to commit himself so suddenly by impulsive speech, and declaring on the other



that as her father was so ill, and could not know what was taking place, there was surely nothing to prevent him from coming to her *now*. Had she been a little older, or better able to reason in her present distress, she would have seen that he was inconsequent, illogical, confessing that his passion had betrayed him and that he must take the consequences, and yet attempting to force an interview now that her father was unable to interfere.

"I will write back to him again, and tell him that he must wait—we must both wait—even if it be for years."

"You know that is nonsense—if anything were to happen to your father you would *not* have to wait."

She was certainly ridiculously nervous, for the words seemed to be spoken to her by a voice from without.

She stopped her ears so that she should not listen to it.

Till now it seemed to her she had been in a childish Elysium, not aware of the coverts in her own intelligence in which shy thoughts could hide away even from her own ken, and unconscious of the moral shock, convulsing her very being, which had come upon her in consequence of Mrs. Capern's idle chatter, or of the minute filaments in her memory which connected this chatter with her own experience in actual fact. Who could tell how far her father had been to blame even with regard to her mother's early death—a foreigner treated with cruelty by a man who was still handsome, young, rich, brilliantly gifted, ambitious, and chafing against the tie which bound him to a wife supposed to destroy his prestige in the society ready to adore him? Who could tell whether his system of neglect might not have hastened her mother's death? The subtle emotions which actuate men, and the complex moves which those men may make, are more difficult as



we advance in so-called civilisation. Alas for the love which he had crushed out in more cases than one! Alas for the tender affection she might have had from her mother! Alas for the education which he had given to herself, to make her subservient to his will, never reckoning on the counter-influences of circumstances and temperament!

Just then the sleeper turned in his sleep. He opened his eyes and asked for water. It was the time to give him his medicine, and, as he looked round anxiously and asked for it, there was a wildness, not only in the large grey eyes themselves, but in the whole expression of the face, which struck Zina with a sort of conviction that it must be his *real* expression; and that the smiling, half-bantering look which he kept up not only in society, but generally in the presence of his daughter and his own servants, was a mask by which he hid the real harsh, egotistical self.

He did not ask his daughter if she were tired, but spoke to her in few words with a sort of insistence. It was a part, no doubt, of her overstrained condition which made her conscious for the instant of a sort of recoil, for which she loathed herself—a feeling of distrust almost bordering on aversion for the man who, in his intense selfishness, had dismissed her lover, angrily forbidding the match without giving any satisfactory reason. Her admiration, almost worship, for her father's intellect had always been far greater than her love for him, and her affection for Stephen had had something of a mother's love in it. She had discerned the weaknesses of his artistic nature, hoping with her own stronger character to shield him from the realities of life. But she did not wonder that he chafed bitterly at a lifelong separation which seemed to be enforced by the egotism of another.

“There can be no possible reason why we should



not be allowed to see each other. Surely we could wait in patience, and I might be of use to you in your present anxiety," he had said in a letter which but half an hour before she had held in her hand.

But Zina knew better, knew that her father expected everyone to yield invariable subservience to his will, and that, though he had not given any distinct reason for his refusal, the years would not change him; she had never yet known him change any resolution.

Once more all her soul was up in arms against him, and then instantly she remembered that he was very ill, just in that state in which something terrible might happen, and that if she were to allow herself to speak to, or think disrespectfully of him, she might never forgive herself.



## CHAPTER X.

### IN THE SICK-ROOM.

ANOTHER week passed. Zina had ceased to take any count of time. All her thoughts were intent on the father who might be drifting away from her, and who kept his face turned away from her, so occupied with his own illness that she could not judge if he were better or worse. The doctors in attendance differed in their opinions, and she was alternately in a state of hopefulness and dejection, exhausted by her own conjectures.

She had written to Stephen to forbid him to attempt to see her, reminding him how her father's illness had begun with an exciting scene, and how since then he had seemed to go down-hill from bad to worse; how he could only talk of his sufferings or look at her as if he reproached her, so that she shuddered at the thought of anything which might widen the breach which had already taken place between them.

Sometimes Stuart Newbolt would groan and toss



his arms about. Then he would wander a little in his talk, his thoughts dwelling on the past.

It was hard that he should still refuse to be waited upon during the night by the nurse. For he was difficult to please. And when Zina rose to give him his medicine he seemed always to be reminded of the immediate cause of his illness. She fancied that his glance lighted on her with a sort of suspicion, and when he asked in the thick speech caused by illness, "You have not seen this fellow—or had any communication with him?" the thought crossed her mind in a more direct form than before, "If my father were to die this farce would cease, and I should be free to act out my own life."

*This* time she was in despair. For there was no voice. The wicked idea pure and simple seemed to come from within; there could no longer be any chance of deceiving herself.

She trembled and sat down, feeling as if her limbs refused to bear her; no doubt she was weak from her constant attendance on the sick man. She was not even aware that she had left his question unanswered, as she awoke with a shudder to the recognition of the fact that she had anticipated—almost wished, though only for a moment, for her father's death.

Had any doctor, or any clergyman, practised in reading character, been able to look into her heart, or any psychologist skilled ever so slightly in understanding the morbid tricks of an excitable imagination unable to shake off a melancholy caused by a habit of reserve; or had she herself been freer from the strange suggestive thoughts and emotions which had haunted her from her youth upwards, she would have known that what she needed was more sleep, and plenty of fresh air. But she had no one to warn her to resist a mental habit, which if aggravated would become like a disease.



She had no sense of exaggeration in accusing herself of having wished for her father's death. It was untrue—she wronged herself when she reflected at the same moment that the next step downward might have been—murder! To desire, to even contemplate, a fellow-creature's death with the idea of the advantage which might accrue to oneself was, according to that ideal Christianity which she had discussed so often with Mary Carruthers, nothing less than murder itself—the wish was the same as the act. Neither was there anyone to assure her that she had seized upon the sterner side of the Christian creed, or to remind her that she was outraging nature when she still undertook more than her fair share of work during the weary watches of the next few nights, not perceiving the increasing jealousy of the professional nurse, who had become lynx-eyed to Miss Newbolt's eccentricities, and not knowing that by her very assiduity she was heightening her morbid condition, without succeeding in quieting the conscience which had so suddenly been aroused.

The doctors had ordered her father laudanum to lull the pain from which he suffered, and it often became a part of Zina's duty to measure out the doses. She would willingly have evaded this duty, but though the invalid was still morose and irritable in his manner to everyone, he seemed less and less willing to allow her out of his sight.

Her natural character did not assert itself under the crisis, and more than one of the medical men saw the quick, spasmodic movement with which she tried to bear up as she leant over the sick man, who would have no arms but hers around him in his contortions of agony. She did not let it embarrass her, though in his delirium he talked against her. Only when it was stormy weather and the night winds were howling round the house, striking



weird melodies from the harmonica-wires of the wind-harp, which in happier days she had put up outside the window, did she break into tears and cry. "He is not so bad. He is only like other people when they are ill, with a longing to pick a quarrel with somebody or other, and have it out with somebody supposed to have offended them. I myself have felt just like that—the people who speak against him are calumniators and liars."

Yet when the morning came, and the doctors went on giving her hope, she was too exhausted to know if she were glad, and the weary self-reproaches would begin over again. And when the time came round for pouring out his dose, the old tormenting voice seemed to whisper into her ear, "If—if—he were never to awaken from this sleep!"

Whence came this hair-splitting tendency this want of balance, this ridiculous subtlety?

Could she help the picture conjured up by her vivid imagination in the twinkling of an eye? The involuntary tricks played by this morbid imagination were a part of the temperament which might have made her a heroine or a martyr. It was not her own thought, as she had sense enough to perceive—it was hateful, barbarous, loathsome—it must have been transmitted to her from the savage instincts of some half-civilised ancestors. Her training had taught her to disbelieve in any bad influence from without, in any diabolic flashes of thought flung across her own half-sleeping consciousness; and yet she would have been glad to think that this haunting terror did not originate from her own will, thankful to fling it away from her as diabolic.

She hesitated, her fingers trembled, so unwilling was she to pour out the dose. But it had to be given, and after it he sank as usual into a troubled sleep. When he woke again his mind seemed to be quite hazy. There was nothing more to cause



excitement, no trouble, no anxious questionings of any kind, and once more she asked herself if there could be really any chance of recovery, and wondered vaguely if he were to die as he had lived.

At one moment she had nearly yielded to a pressing impulse to drop down on her knees by her father's bedside.

She felt that it would ease her surcharged heart, and that there would be something quieting in the attitude of prayer, but she asked herself to whom she was to kneel, repelling the impulse and hiding her face in the bedclothes with a shuddering cry. Old recollections, old thoughts of her childhood, of her father's former tenderness to her, rather than his later irritation, crowded upon her and prompted her to pray; for Zina had been born to be an enthusiast, and had been drawn at one time to all that was primeval and essential in Christianity. And though the formulæ had been given up, the mysticism still remained. In the old days there would have been the making of a saint about this woman—now, only a bitter questioning, a vacuity and darkness troubled her.

She began to have a nervous terror of that other watcher who often insisted on staying in the room, who again hinted that *she* should be blamed if anything went wrong with her case. "Case—" that was what her father was called. It struck Zina once more with that touch of humour which had more of pain in it than amusement that he was simply "a case", even when she caught the nurse's eyes fixed on hers with a meaning which she did not fathom or even try to understand. So all her thoughts were fixed on that life which was hanging by a thread, and in the silence which thrilled her during the awful hours of the night she was conscious again of that agony of compunction for the fact that this illness had begun after a quarrel—the first serious quarrel between herself and her father.



Every sense seemed to be intensified, every sound, every sight; but the thought that the nurse's unfriendly eyes were fixed upon her would as effectually have restrained her from prayer as that other thought which was just then pressing its icy fingers on her heart, that she was brought face to face with inviolable laws to which it was her duty to try to adjust herself—laws as awful as the awful reality of the Unknowable.

The patient slept again more heavily than before, but he stirred and muttered in his sleep, as a gust of memory swept over him. They bent down to hear what he said—he was muttering of his gambling debts.



## CHAPTER XI.

### TOO LATE.

THE poor girl never afterwards forgot those hours of watching. It was several nights since she had gone to bed, and she had almost left off feeling the natural inclination to sleep. But her nerves were overstrained, and her senses still exaggerated every sight and sound. The loud ticking of the clock on the stairs and the feebler pulse of the watch on the table of the room, each grated on her senses and seemed to keep time with the subtle questions which she was unable to answer—subtle and ridiculous questions which might have been suggested to her by sinister beings bent on hurting her. The lamp, like the great haunting eye of some uncanny Cyclops, stared at her through the darkness.

It did not supply sufficient light in the room for her to see her father's face, had he not turned it away from observation as he habitually did.

But she was certain that she saw the sharpened



profile on the pillow, and could picture him to herself dead, so that never another word from her could reach him. She felt inclined to cry out, but restrained herself as a matter of duty, so impressed was she with the idea that soon, very soon, her father would be gone and she no longer able to communicate with him, though they had much to say to each other.

She did utter a cry when towards the morning Stuart Newbolt opened his heavy eyes, but it was quite plain that he no longer saw his daughter, neither did he hear. He looked at her with an infantile smile; it was indeed too late for any further intercourse now.

"Too late!" she repeated to herself, recognising the futility of human effort, crushed and overwhelmed by it, as both women attempted in vain to rouse the sick man from that fatal inclination to sleep.

"The effect of the draught should have passed off now, if he did not take more than he ought to have taken during the night," muttered the nurse, loud enough for Zina to hear her.

But Zina heard nothing. The re-action had come; she was too tired to take in any definite idea. Afterwards she remembered that she tottered, and would have fallen had not somebody stretched out a hand to help her. Once indeed she caught herself talking out loud a sort of delirious nonsense; but she did not know that she was saying strange things about herself. A sort of dull apathy seemed to have taken possession of *her* as well as of the man by whose sick-bed they were watching.

Neither did she see the expression of the other woman's face. She only saw that dying face, with the blank look of the eyes whenever they succeeded in rousing him for a moment—a look as if the soul had put up its shutters to concentrate all its efforts on the struggle which was being waged within. She



suddenly remembered once to have heard her father say in one of his sarcastic moods, that he did not like the idea of death, and he believed that in their secret hearts most men were cowards about it; but that he hoped by the study of natural science to prolong his own life to that period of senile decay, when there would be nothing to feel and nothing to encounter. She recalled that speech with a shudder just now. For, if there was mortal conflict going on behind those blank eyes which looked so much like closed shutters, why should she speak to disturb the soul which was settling itself to rest? To *rest*? To the eternal sleep of which he had so often spoken, dying out like a vegetable? She could not reconcile it with her other ideas that there *might* be such things as eternal principles, of which outward appearances were only the accidental and fleeting forms.

She was so absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not notice the nurse's indignant astonishment, as she said in a low tone, "Do not vex him—do not disturb him—let him rest."

The doctors came with their low-toned questions, and she could gather that they were surprised, especially the younger and cleverer of them, who had been the most sanguine of the two, and had throughout given hope of Stuart Newbolt's recovery. She saw them examining the bottle with the laudanum, but, even then, she did not know that there would be no awakening for her father, that all was over, and that he had actually died since he had taken his last dose. She was so thoroughly worn out that she was only conscious of an awful stillness, a hushed period of waiting, and then—as they suggested that she should go to her room—of the trees in the square melting by degrees into the pale grey of the evening light, till their outlines became like everything else, shadowy and indistinct. One of the maids came to her and suggested that she



should take a cup of tea, being evidently much astonished that Miss Newbolt had not drawn down her window-blinds.

The apparent zeal of the servants grated on her feelings. What right had *they* to make such a fuss—they to whom he had never really belonged? Why should they shed tears when her eyelids were dry? She insisted on redraping the bed on which they had laid out the corpse; she persuaded herself that she would make it look less ghastly if she arranged some lace round the pillows.

What, she asked herself, was the use of the outward mourning and all the paraphernalia of crape with the anodyne of fashion-books which the dress-makers were already sending, when it was the soul alone which mourned? And why did they want to close the windows, and make the atmosphere hot and stuffy?

"It's not respectable-like for her to sit in that way, staring right in front of her, and not shedding a tear," reported her maid in the servants' hall, which just then was thronged with gossips, as none of the servants were performing their ordinary work, and everyone's usual avocation seemed to be gone.

She did not take the tea, she did not lie down, and she did not weep, for all her passionate feelings were focussed on one subject.

She had never till now thought seriously about death, nor allowed herself to feel that it would not be worth while to face the present existence if there were not another life. But she was overcome by the presence of the white face on the pillow—the Thing which had once been her father, but which now seemed no longer to have any part in her. The Why, the Whence, and the Where came upon her with overwhelming force, and she was unable to give them an answer.



"How feeble *he* would have called me," she thought as she turned away from the corpse, "how often have I heard him say that we have no more right than the molecule to protest against being merged in the whole."

Then came the recollection of Stephen Dewe. Was it worth while to love any creature, any human being, and to expend the very essence of one's soul, drop by drop, when after all came death, and love might end in—*nothing*?

But was it possible that Life could end—*end*—that one, so palpitating with it and its hopes and fears as she had been till lately, could exist no longer? She sat down, with her head in her feverish hands, and found the problem unthinkable, as many a woman has found it before her—then derided herself for her childish egotism. Had she not been equally silly when, as a little girl, she had been puzzled to conceive of the world going on before she was born?

She laughed at her own absurdity. And yet if there were no future life, nothing to reward one after all—then why all this nerve-suffering, why all this complex civilisation? Let life be natural and simple, let men and women enjoy themselves to their finger-tips! She hoped that there was an answer to this heathen philosophy, more satisfactory than the blind optimism which was fainting and sinking when it ought to have sustained her; she had always recognised the necessity for righteousness and love—the altruism which considers the feelings and well-being of others, and which trained her to the habit of trying to understand things as they were, and express them without exaggeration. If the corpse which dented the bedclothes with solemn outlines in the same house could arise and speak to her, would it not say, as *he* often had said, "Zina, do not get into that foolish feminine habit of exaggerating your feelings."



And yet, as the sparrows flew past her window, and as the outlines of the trees grew dimmer in the square, they seemed to say to her,

“Oh, foolish mortal, why do you wear yourself out for nothing? The beautiful sunlight has gone, and the peace of the summer days. You have let them all pass, you have thrown your treasures from you. And now the winter will soon be on you, and you will weep in the days which are dark and sullen, and soon death may come, and nothing will be left to you.”

The next day was like a passing medley of shadows, with only a break now and then, and surprise following closely on the heels of surprise.

There were the usual influx of cards, and the usual condolences of friends which seemed to her so trite and miserably commonplace. Then there was the necessary investigation of her father's affairs—the tearing up of his letters and the strange papers he had left behind him—strange notes of a strange mind—strange intricacies of a most unusual life.

And, finding some leaves of a diary left in his desk which seemed to throw rather an odd and unexpected light on some of the gossip retailed to her by Eva Capern, she thought it better to send at once for the family lawyer. He came, a grave and astute man, whom she had known from her childhood, kind withal but not encouraging. How *could* he encourage her when it appeared, after a little inquiry, that Stuart Newbolt had indeed eaten up his fortune, leaving nothing for the descendants who might possibly come after him? Scarcely enough to pay the servants would be left out of the wreck. Years before he had invested in a company which ensured him at first 20 per cent interest; then, as the interest decreased, he had sunk more and more of his hundreds with the hope of gaining as large a profit for his capital as before. Suddenly most of his



profits had ceased, but he had indemnified himself for his losses by sinking the rest of his capital in purchasing a handsome annuity for his lifetime. Everything that he had had died with him, and though he had taken the pains to write a letter in which he blamed the specious swindling companies which play havoc with a man's capital by offering ruinous interest, no one could have known better than himself that the will which he left behind him was as worthless as waste paper.

Zina received the announcement as coldly and unconcernedly as if it had not affected herself. *This* then was what her father had kept in reserve, and what he had often longed to tell her. Probably, as she said to herself, making excuses for the dead, he had some well-planned scheme for her own benefit which made him object to her marriage with Stephen. Whatever it was, it would be locked up now in the silence of the grave, and, if other people did not think him excusable they were wrong; they had no right to judge him for a miscalculation, an error in arithmetic, which could scarcely be deemed a crime. When his moral laxity in questions of debit and credit became more evident she still refused to blame him, and though she winced a little to think how the respect inclining to servility which people had hitherto paid to his money would suddenly disappear, and how the full odium of the miserable state of things must fall upon herself, she smiled at the remembrance that Stephen Dewe would be ready to protect her.

Her vivid imagination was ready to picture the humiliations and vexations which would be sure to follow in a few days; how some of the clever journalists would pen pungent and witty sentences at the expense of the name of Newbolt, and how scornfully they would descant on the pretensions of this new adventurer who had made such a suc-



cessful assault on the fortress of London society, seeming for a time as if he would take it by storm. Well, what did it matter? If Stephen hurried the marriage as he was sure to do, she would soon be changing the name of Newbolt—the great thing which mattered was that none of these things could vex her father now!



## CHAPTER XII.

### CAN HE DISTRUST HER?

EVA CAPERN had been wonderfully sparing of her visits since her guardian's illness had become more serious, and the world had begun to talk.

Her admitted objection to everything which was "unpleasant", an objection which Stuart Newbolt had done his best to inculcate, had made her fight shy of the house during that period of breathless interest, that hush in the drama of Life, which almost always takes place where Death is expected to take possession. In the beginning she had taken the illness lightly, but at the first serious alarm had made up her mind that it would end fatally, and had never shared in the sanguine forecast of either the nurse or the more cheerful doctor. And now she absented herself on the score of delicate health. Zina resented her heartlessness on her father's account; for, whatever other duty he might have failed to discharge, Stuart Newbolt had never been found wanting in his position of faithfulness towards



his ward. Again she congratulated herself that she would be free of Eva in the future, with no need for Mrs. Capern's help, or her patronising ways, for Stephen Dewe could only be waiting for the first few hours of her bereavement to pass before he presented himself as her affianced lover. Ah, what a good thing that she had Stephen who would not allow Eva Capern to worry her by transgressing the bounds of politeness in the familiarity of her questioning; what a comforting thing that Stephen was simple-minded, and had none of the aristocratic tricks of manner which she loathed in some of the men her father had wanted her to marry! What a shock of disgust those men would have had when they came to know all about her, her father, and her poor mother! What a mercy she had refused to marry them! But Stephen was so different, to whom she would never be slavishly bound by mysterious obligations, founded on financial considerations! The thought of him came to her with a sense of rest, emotion, and even gratitude. She had never yet rushed into his arms, never yet wept upon his bosom, but had he come to her then, when her heart was full to bursting, she would probably have given vent to her pent-up emotions. It never occurred to her to think how they were to support themselves. Hitherto she had been so free from the biting vexations and cankering cares of poverty that she scarcely troubled to ask herself if Stephen Dewe had enough for both of them.

The middle of the day came, the lawyer had gone. He was well stricken in years, and Zina had not hesitated to tell him that he need not be solicitous about her future, for that she was on the eve of her marriage with a man to whom she had been for some time engaged. He was of opinion that sufficient would be left from the annuity to enable her to wind up her father's affairs, and already she



had sent for the servants and given them their dismissal. The interview with the nurse she deferred till the last, for she had never thoroughly liked the woman, who now announced her intention of waiting for the funeral. Zina was equally determined that she should not wait, but in getting rid of her she counted on Stephen Dewe's assistance.

The afternoon wore on, and Stephen Dewe did not come. She went up into her room and tried to calm herself by lying down, but finding it impossible to keep still, she rose and fell into her old habit of walking for the hour together, restlessly, aimlessly, up and down, up and down the floor—waiting, waiting, though she did not like to say so to herself. Never before in all her life had she to acknowledge to herself that she was waiting—and for a *man*—who did not come!

Many already had been the inquiries at the street-door, but surely Stephen should have been the first. Whatever business he might chance to have should have been put aside at once, when she, whom he loved, was in need of assistance. Perhaps he, too, had heard some of the unkind gossip. She put the thought aside as an outrageous one, which only roused her laughter. For if she was inclined to ponder a little as to what *some* folk, for whose opinion she might care, might say about the crash which had come into her life and her sudden disappearance, as that of a sort of female pretender, from Chester-Square, she had only smiled at her own egotism, reminding herself that she and her belongings were not the only people in the world, and that a "nine days wonder" about them signified very little. If it mattered little to them, how much less to Stephen, who was ready to take everything on his own broad shoulders, and who cared as little as she did for mere tittle-tattle.

At last the darkness fell—the darkness of the



summer night, preceded by a long period of twilight, and then she started up suddenly. But the rap did not come to announce Mr. Dewe. The nurse, whom she had tried to forget, did not wait to be welcomed in. She came in aggressively, with a strange look on her face, which was unusually white.

It occurred to Zina that she had perhaps failed in her duty in not offering the woman a glass of wine. She spoke her thought aloud, taking up the keys, and determining to order some of the best port which her father's cellar contained.

But, to her surprise, the nurse shrank back with a shrewd look upon her pallid face. She announced her resolution of taking neither bread nor sup again in that house, and of hastening away from it as soon as it were possible to do so; and Zina turned cold, while the beads of perspiration stood on her forehead, as the woman went on to tell her for the first time that the doctor, who had thought his patient would recover, had not hesitated to hint that the nurse in attendance had probably given him too much laudanum.

"How *could* he be so unfair to you? Of course you set it right. Why, it was *I* who gave him the two last doses of opium. He would not let you come near him, still less pour out his medicine. We did not even venture to tell him that you were behind the screen in his room," faltered Zina, the old agony returning to her, as the old morbid idea again took possession of her brain, and she once more remembered a sophistical argument, which she had even heard her father himself maintain—that a wish often leads to an unconscious act. "It was *I* who gave it, but I dropped it out with the greatest care."

"I told them you would say so; they always say they have taken the greatest care," retorted the woman in an insolent voice.



"Whom do you mean by *they?* or *them?*" asked Zina in a low voice.

"Dr. Melton and the tall fair gentleman who called in the afternoon, and would not let you be disturbed," answered the nurse, evading the first question. "The lawyer had told the servants that the fair young gentleman was to be admitted, and he came in when I was having high words with the doctor. No doubt it is all a mistake; these things generally are. But the gentleman stood in the hall—he must have overheard—for he burst right in upon us, and said he could answer for your carefulness in sick nursing. Carefulness or not, I am sorry to have to say it, but I have been insulted and interfered with ever since I entered this house, and leave it I will—the sooner the better; there's a curse hanging over the place."

The angry woman stopped suddenly in her excited speech. She was a worthy woman, and it was not her fault that being unimaginative she took things too literally, or that a long apprenticeship in the sick-room had lessened rather than intensified her sympathies; not her fault if nature had denied the proper amount of oil necessary for the gracious working of her spiritual machinery. She had intended to do her duty, but the sight of Miss Newbolt staring at her long and fixedly, evidently trying to collect her thoughts, failing to do so, and yet shrinking visibly as she began to understand, brought her suddenly to the recollection of possible consequences. For the nurse had never before come in contact with such speaking eyes, never guessed that there could be such power of expression in any human countenance. It was *her* turn to shrink as those innocent eyes blazed upon her, and the true character of their owner became transparent as that of a child.

"Sometimes when people are a little overdone,



they scarcely know what they are doing—perhaps that was the case with you last night,” she stammered, trying to take back her imputation.

Years afterwards it all came back to Zina in a calmer mood.

How the woman—indignant at the imputation on her own management—might not have intended any special meaning to be attached to her words.

They had, none of them, any comprehension of Miss Newbolt’s shivering sensitiveness, nor how it was that a suspicion born in her own imagination and suddenly taking shape, could smite her like a deadly missile. It was strange how it had never occurred to her to think that the nurse in her blind anger might have been heedless of what she said, not meaning half of it, or animated only by a childish desire to sting and irritate. Had she not been living in an atmosphere of perpetual apprehension, where the merest whisper swelled into reality and intensity, as if it had travelled through a speaking tube, Zina knew afterwards that the foolish imputation would have been powerless to injure.

But just then she could not reason. Just then it was more natural for it to flash upon her that the nurse, who had doubtless seen many strange things in different houses, in the various experiences of her difficult cases, might have formed a theory of her own—a theory not actually likely to hurt her, since it had probably been a part of her training to learn to keep a quiet tongue in her head, and if she as well as the family doctor came in sometimes for strange chapters in life, those strange chapters would not be revealed. What else could the woman mean? She was certainly no adept at insinuating rather than speaking, as Eva Capern might have done, with pretty gesture and waves of the hand. And the bewildered girl’s brain was still incapable of reasoning.





"THEY BE HER MARRIAGE LINES."—*See Chapter VIII.*







"Go—go—I—cannot understand what you mean—and even if I could, I should refuse to discuss it with you," she stammered in her agitation and perplexity, pointing to the door. "Do you not see that I am ill? I was never like this before. How cold I am!"

Her teeth were chattering, her whirling thoughts lapsing into chaos, and before the nurse could obey her order, her head fell forward as if she were half asleep, and in another moment she lay unconscious on the floor.

It was more than an hour afterwards, between eleven and twelve o'clock, when Stephen Dewe stood again at the door of the house in Chester-Square.

The darkness had grown deeper, but the stars had taken their places like silent sentinels in the sky, the Bear, Orion, Cassiopeia, and the Milky Way, shining over the great city which lay stretched like a shapeless mass beneath.

But the innumerable starry points of the dusky sky had at that moment no message for him, any more than for the unhappy girl, who had been trained to look at them as only a "brilliant eruption" on the firmament, containing no blissful spot, and no possible home where the weary and ill-treated would find a refuge after death.

She had recovered from her transitory faintness, and in the craving of her heart for human tenderness, had determined to put silly pride on one side, and was listening with beating heart for her lover's footstep—he who would protect her from all indignity, watch over her, and decide for her in difficulties which seemed to be too serious for one person to settle! For she could not reason as yet—her sense of degradation excluding all other and more natural ideas—or perhaps she might have thought twice as to the wisdom of appealing to Stephen Dewe when the world about her seemed to be topsy-turvy.



The rest of the world was going on as if nothing was turned upside down, or in any way affected by the craziness within her.

A carriage bringing some elegantly dressed women from the theatre was standing at the next door, the jingling of the reins as the coachman drove away, blending with the sound of dance-music from a piano a few doors further off, and reminding Stephen that, in spite of the event which had just happened, the London season—that strange orgie of refined rioting—was still in full swing, and that he still continued to inhabit the wealthiest, the poorest, the cleverest and the stupidest, the gayest and the saddest city on this globe.

It was with much anxiety and some sinking of the heart that he inquired again for Zina. It was true that he had been to the house once before to comfort her in her loneliness after her father's death, and that he had overheard the nurse's gossip—true also that he found himself unable to sleep or to rest at any distance from Zina without inquiring for further news.

He had no expectation of seeing her, and he told himself afterwards that nothing in all his life had *amazed* him so much as that she should have broken through all the usual conventional rules by coming down to him at that hour.

The light dazzled her; she had been so long in the sick-room that she seemed at first scarcely to understand whose was the dark figure, which stood awaiting her in the hall.

She drew him into the study. There was something weird and terrifying in her pallid beauty, with the eyes dark and deep, which gave character to her face. He gazed at her in astonishment.

Paracelsus was wont to describe an experiment in which a flower perished; you burnt it; whatever was left of the original flower was dispersed—you



knew not whither and no efforts could re-constitute it. But the power of chemistry—according to Paracelsus—enabled you to raise a spectrum from the burnt dust of the flower, just as it appeared in life. It is not necessary for us to vouch—as the elder Disraeli did—for the credibility of such an idea. It is sufficient to say that in the human being it sometimes seems as if the soul may have escaped like the essence of such a flower, and the appearance which remains has an unreality like the spectrum. It was as if the real Zina had gone.

She had been the woman whom he revered, whom he worshipped with pure devotion, who had climbed to the heights of human intelligence and preserved all the purity of a child, in whom the head and heart had seemed to be alike developed—that rare combination in a woman. She had been more than human to him before, but she was less than human now, with the horrible imputation contained in that uncanny talk sounding in his ears, and the change in her own appearance seeming to give a sinister importance to that chatter. He was sorry for her, pitiful, when he thought of the way in which she had been brought up; but he was a young man of critical as well as artistic nature, and at that moment he felt as if she could never be to him again the idol he had worshipped.

He tried to speak, but the twitching mouth inadvertently betrayed him. Yet something passed between them in the effort of those one or two words which did not need speech, the *sound*, as it were, of the sentiment which conveyed a physical as well as a mental impression to her delicate nerves. It was one of those moments which do not easily repeat themselves in life, and which, if they did, would make the effort of living impossible.

His sudden terror was as real to her as if he had vulgarly accused her, forcing his want of trust,



brutally, down her throat. And in one instant she had recovered herself. "Go! go! I cannot speak to you now. I am too much upset," she said, forgetful that she herself had summoned him but the moment before. Then she tottered towards the door, sparing of her regrets or her farewells, determined to exert her will to the uttermost, lest her fainting attack should repeat itself. For the unexpected attitude of the man on whom she had relied had the effect upon her of a cold douche—the possibility that he could feel distrustful about her for a moment brought her to her senses.

Alone in the room by her father's corpse, she sat up during the silent hours of the night pale and indignant, no longer absent-minded and pre-occupied, no longer a prey to morbid thoughts.

The want of anything like real imagination in Stephen Dewe's case, when the illuminating power of music could not come to his assistance, which had so little prepared him for something unusual in her character—something out of the common beat—even if it were overstrained and morbid, roused her to self-defence and a healthier re-action. Again and again during the hours of the night she occupied herself with going over and over her past. She who had always till now been self-reliant and never needed a mother, and who had been just old enough, when her mother died, to realise that she and her father had little in common, now racked her brain to remember the episodes of her childhood. Memory had filched away much that was precious, but she could recall the proud looks and airs of infallibility with which her father had indignantly reprobated her mother's Catholic teaching, himself an apostle of free thought content, with his official ordnance map of the infinite Universe in which he lived. She had a half-pathetic and half-humorous recollection of her mother's great belief in her daughter's supe-



rior brain-power, and of how little she had interfered with her unless her interference was necessary. In the old days she had thought a little scornfully of that poor crushed mother, telling herself that she had no admiration for those compliant, no-charactered women, who swamped their own habits and opinions in those of their husbands. But now she found herself, to her astonishment, calling upon her for help, when she did not know to whom to call, with that sense of the eerie which makes us shiver at the consciousness of mere disembodied wills and intelligences in a possibly invisible world of which we have not the key.

"O mother, whom I slighted till I lost you, never guessing at the intense aching of your heart while you patiently waited! O father, who treated her so coldly and strangely, but whose intellect was so keen that it did not seem as if it *could* die! Do either of you see me now? Was it from either of you that I inherited this gift for puzzling and tormenting myself? Speak to me if you can, speak, and let me know, if you exist, that there is a future life in which the injustices and misunderstandings of this one will be set right," she cried as she stretched herself by the side of the corpse.

Was it nothing which responded to her aspiration—to her cry for help in her emergency? Would it be of any use for her to have recourse to what other people called prayer?

In the morning she was delirious—the doctors spoke of brain fever, and Stephen Dewe was in constant attendance. Her voice could be heard outside the door of her room, and there were moments when his anxiety was suspended by a new and strange curiosity. For the sick girl was accusing herself in her ravings, the women servants listening open-mouthed and frightened. He sent them downstairs with the assurance by which he attempted to brace



his own mind, that sick people in this condition always harped on things which were farthest from the truth. Not the less was he impatient, fidgetting up and down the passage, stopping his ears that he might not hear, and then standing still and unconsciously listening in his stupefaction.

Again and again there were iterations of the same dreary complaints—her father's coldness, and his attempts to separate her from her lover. And then she harped on the hours of nursing, and the possibility of the medicine having been administered too carelessly. There was still nothing tangible for his dread to lay hold of, but the fact that he had fears was betrayed by his ashen—no longer love-glorified—face.

One day when he had meant to ask if she were asleep, that he might just look in on her, or leave her a message to be given should she wake, that gnawing fear got the better of him. The quirks of memory distracted him for it came back to him in a way he would rather have forgotten that he too had dwelt impatiently on the fact of how the father's life stood in the way of the marriage.

The whole prospect seemed to have undergone some gruesome change—it was no longer pleasant to him—the associations had spoiled it. He was no longer chafing feverishly at the inaction rendered necessary by her illness, or questioning the nurses hoarsely as to how soon she would be well enough to see him.

She had ordered him to go, and, as she repeated these entreaties that he should go in agonised tones of voice which resounded through the silent house, he determined to take her at her word—and go abroad—at least for a time.

He left a letter to tell her, that as the doctors had assured him it was necessary for her to be kept very quiet, and an interview with him would be



only likely to upset her even in convalescence, he had determined to immolate his own happiness on the altar of self-sacrifice. He felt a brute, and was not contented with his own wretched platitudes when he had written them, being haunted by the drawn misery of her pinched, unconscious face, still tussling with forces stronger than herself. But it was true enough that they had assured him she was already better, and would be likely to recover more quickly in his absence.

"It is all different," he said, "and will be always different for me *now*. And who am I;" he added to himself, "to insist on tormenting her with my presence?"



## CHAPTER XIII.

### A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHEN Zina recovered from her interval of delirium, it was to find that the funeral was over, and that all that was mortal of Stuart Newbolt had been carried, not without parade, to the grave. The world had proved kinder than she had expected, and piles of snowy blossoms had crushed one another on the coffin—presents from the numerous guests who had constantly been entertained at Mr. Newbolt's table—shewing wealth enough to have defrayed the expenses of a poorer man's funeral.

Zina was alone when she first recovered her consciousness. Her first impulse was to go to the window and put her head out in the fresh air, and her next to remember that she might be seen, and to retire from the light. Then she recalled everything—the wildly intoxicating visions of that night when she had thought that it might be possible for the spirits of the dead to appear to her, and the cruel and ignoble suspicions of the one man living whom she had trusted.



The cloud was lifted from her brain; she no longer reproached herself, but she could have laughed bitterly at herself for her misplaced faith, and for supposing that she could ever be the friend of one who could so mistrust her, as if the consciousness of a terrible crime—*forsooth*—had stepped between them. She shivered at the remembrance of her own insanity. It was all like a miserable nightmare, which made her still wish to hide herself, alike from the cruel sunshine which seemed to mock her, as from the stars with a million eyes which had likewise seemed to stare at her burning shame during the intolerable agony of that ever to-be-remembered night.

But the delirium was over now—a thing of the past—and with its departure her strength of mind came back. She arose from her sick-bed an altered woman, more soured and suspicious, with her better nature crushed out of her by the conduct of one whom she had so devotedly loved; and whom she could not but believe to have been influenced by other motives than those which appeared on the surface.

She had received Stephen Dewe's letter, and never mentioned his name, but in her secret heart she said, "He left me because he found out that I was penniless; it was not possible that he could think what he pretended to think about me."

Neither did she trouble herself any more about Mary's creed, but felt thankful that she had been able to resist superstition, and that she had been taught to repress the miserable egotism which might lead her to confide every puny trouble to a First Cause that possibly did not exist.

"As if my troubles would signify, even if It existed! I have to steel myself to bear, as other people have to bear things," she said with a sneer at her own expense, determining at the same time



to cure herself of her susceptibility to the opinions of others.

There was a new hardness about her which Eva Capern recognised with astonishment when she offered her a home as her companion, and when Zina rejoined that she was "too proud to live on charity." From the sale of her father's furniture, books, and articles of *vertu*, she realised a little for her immediate needs; but much of this was required for the creditors.

To do Mrs. Capern justice she had never attached any importance to the self-accusations of an overworked, highly-strung, conscientious girl, and she really intended to be generous. Not the less was she evidently relieved when Zina declined her offer, telling her with an odd abrupt laugh that she had determined to try and forget herself and her own worries in Art. "If I can only lose my own identity in what I try to produce!" said the girl, a little surprised at herself for hating the proffered kindness of the woman, yet telling herself that Eva cared nothing about her, and only wished to make her an instrument for furthering her own ends; that her heart was in fact branded by fashion and worldliness as with the stamp of a hot iron.

That longing to be doing something more than could be found in the ordinary routine of an idle woman's life made her turn with greater pleasure to an invitation from Mary Carruthers. Mary's husband had been seriously ill, and for the benefit of his health she had given up her dismal lodgings in London and taken a cottage near Kingston-on-Thames.

"Come and be one of us and earn your own living," Mary wrote in a glow of enthusiasm. "We have found a house and garden to be let for almost nothing. The children are beside themselves with delight. We shall be better off than usual, as they



have appointed me one of the editors of the Family Magazine, in which I have to act Mother Confessor to any number of young women of the shop-girl class, telling them about everything from Rowland's Macassar Oil to the choice of a suitable husband. James is already better, and we only need *you* to complete our family circle."

Zina was, as usual, rather angry with James, of whom Mary wrote with the tenderest pity. She had always felt certain that if James could be induced to be a little more active, his health would be improved. But her sympathy for Mary only made her the more willing to fall into her scheme of attempting to support herself by her painting. The time seemed to her very far off when she had pitied other women for being forced to earn their bread; her opinion had changed since she had known greater hardships. People, on the whole, were very kind. The old Canadian had written that, though he had unfortunately failed in his project of giving the same visual prominence to a single photograph which had hitherto been confined to the stereoscope, he was not without hope for his scheme about balloons, and if Miss Newbolt would accept some employment from him, he was now busied with a new invention which would displace the telescope, and bring the far-away worlds so near to our eyes that a coming generation might be able to hold intercourse with the inhabitants of Mars.

Zina smiled as she re-read the letter on her short journey to the Carruthers. The flash and roar of the train, the wild flowers still blooming in the cuttings, the fresh green fields, the stately trees, and the coming in contact with ordinary people at the station were already giving a healthier tone to her thoughts. The season of winter was comparatively near, for the trees were in their autumnal tints, but it was a blessing and delight to breathe



the fresh air of heaven again. The scent of the earth sprinkled with falling rain was cheering as the sight of Mary's face, wholesome and encouraging, with no dismal talk about the past. Mary was accompanied by the children, and they all walked together from the station, picking their steps amid little pools of rain reflecting the grey of the clouds and the reds and russets of the decaying foliage, like tiny fluttering lakes in the road.

"It must be so stupid for you to walk," said Mary, as she tripped carefully over some of the poor little puddles, which were pretending that they too were of the sky, "so hard when you have always been accustomed to a carriage, and stupid for you to come at this dull season—no folk come to us at this time you know—and soon there will be a prevalence of snow and flood. In summer there are water-parties, chance artists, and families from London; and in summer too the fields near us are rich with poppies, looking as if they were sprinkled with blood. We hope to have sparkles of gold from crocuses in the spring; we have laid in a good stock to plant, in our garden."

She was prattling to cheer her friend, as she would have prattled to a child, but Zina did not hear her. Her eyes were wandering away to the mould in the fields, on each side of the road, turned up for tillage, of a colour which was refreshing, and she was thinking that some such process of healthy "turning-up" was taking place in her own life.

No greater help could have come to her than Mary's unsuspectingness, Mary's single-heartedness, and her matter-of-fact acceptance of the law of work for herself, and consequently for everyone else. Mary was too busy to think it odd for Zina to wish to be left alone to think. Without some such time for the healing processes of nature to go on unhindered, as Zina told herself in after life, she



might have gone mad, or worse still, she might have petrified into the mere semblance of a living woman. But everything seemed to help her in this calm retreat, everything at first seemed to be soothing to her nerves, from the tremor of air occasionally agitating the few dry leaves left on a poplar near her window to the stone-strewn rippling stream which purled on towards the river, and the beech twigs against the sky, and also beneath her window, of a delicate hazel colour, shading into a rich brown when the last leaves of all hanging by their feeble petioles fell off and rotted on the ground. Nothing was left then but the needles of the firs standing out against the wintry clouds.

"It was all the same to her," as she said sometimes to herself, "whether the sky were blue or whether it were grey," quoting in her despondency.

"The clouds that gather round the setting sun,  
Do take a sober colouring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality."

Yet the retirement of that winter did everything for Zina. She could perceive how it was owing to her own excitability, and the mismanagement of her own affairs that she had been nearly falling on the horns of such a dilemma.

She could remind herself not to cherish malice. To remember was not to forgive—she would try not to remember.

It was certainly amongst the middle-class good-wives, whose joyless hard-working faces she had at one time despised, that she was to learn common-sense. Mary prided herself on belonging to that class in society "who live in mean little plaster houses and have one flower-bed for a garden." The garden in which the crocuses were planted was certainly not much larger. But the little woman was healthy-minded, affectionate, and



energetic as ever. She knew well enough that till Zina came to this place of rest she could not think out the thoughts which tormented her. She was aware that her beautiful friend's mind was filled with odds and ends and tangled speculations, and that she suffered in trying to analyse her sufferings. Mary saw it, and did her best to aid her. As a psychologist, all these processes interested her; as a friend, they made her despair.

"I believe I might find an agent if you would take to decorative work—it is much the most lucrative," she said, managing to plan an artist's room for Zina, lighted by glasses so arranged as to cast a sufficient light during the darkest days of winter. "Your powers of brain and hand are a great deal better than mine. You are a real artist, who may expect to live by doing capital work; but I—my career is amusing. What do you think of my coming out as Lorna? That is my name in my correspondence for the 'Family Sympathiser,'" she continued, chattering on in a somewhat long-winded fashion with the hope of turning Zina's thoughts. "Lorna is a wonderful creature, who sharpens her little arrows of speech for those who deserve them, but who is conscious of blundering when she means to help. I assure you there are some pitiful tales poured out to Lorna, and I had one girl the other day who said she would have committed suicide if Lorna had not helped her. Sometimes they write to me about such funny things. One girl wrote to ask whether I would recommend her to sit for two hours a day in a 'Nose Machine' as she had a dreadful 'turned-up' nose (she spelt it 'turnip'); and another woman wrote to consult me about a skin-stretcher, and some new little irons which had been invented to iron away the wrinkles. To the former I answered that 'tiptilted' noses had been glorified by one of our first poets, and that the best connoisseurs of female



beauty would be horrified if 'nose machines' could do away with the *nez retroussé*; to the latter that wrinkles were beautiful; that not only did the cleverest artists like them, but that as a matter of taste, I myself should like to look properly old when the time came. I said that there was something uncanny in always looking unwrinkled like the fruit, which remains green and hard, and never grows mellow.—That is all funny.—But sometimes," she added with a sort of shudder, "they write me private letters about terrible things—things which I could not tell you."

And Zina understood poor Mary's shudder; she sympathised with her distaste for any knowledge of corrupting things, any meddling with hectic complaints—a distaste which was characteristic of the woman.

"It is not my fault," added Mary quickly, "if I could choose for my own girls, I would bring them up in absolute innocence and ignorance. But some folks say that is not wise. Anyhow there are a good many people who grumble at poor Lorna, and she cannot please them all. One correspondent writes to say that we ought to use better paper for our 'Sympathiser,' since it would come in so usefully for wrapping up parcels. Another scolds because I do not have the paper softer, as it would do for cleaning windows. One writes to beg me to have more politics, as it is selfish for women to keep to their own narrow interests; and then another says that politics are a mistake in the paper, and that I ought to have a column for society gossip. I always keep all this correspondence from worrying my husband. Don't you notice how James abhors the 'Family Sympathiser?'"

"Very ungrateful of James," thought Zina, who *had* noticed the look of slight annoyance on the ex-professor's face whenever that vulgar-looking journal was mentioned in his presence.



James had the air of a martyr who could not help feeling desolate in the circumscribed space in which he seemed to find it difficult to breathe, and amid the simple surroundings of the unpretending cottage, with the dull britannia metal forks and spoons, unbreakable plates and tumblers, small allowance of candles, and the *pièce de résistance* in the way of a tough leg of mutton. The ivy-covered, plastered walls were unquestionably in want of ventilation, and the thatched roof was a mass of straw, in a more or less rotten condition. To hear James talk, you might have thought that the little dwelling to which his wife had brought him was a very Pandora's box of all the evils; and yet Mary had prepared a special sanctum for him, with embroidered hangings, in which he might take his siestas in peace, or pursue his scientific and literary studies. Cards were brought in for Mr. Carruthers' edification in the evenings, and his wife seemed never to weary of the eternal game of picquet, which she played to please her husband. And yet there were times when Mary had her depressed moods, though these never betrayed themselves in irritable speech.

"Pot-boiling is always pot-boiling," she would say, with a little laugh at her own expense; "but what would you have? I have no literary connection, no big lions to call on me, and no fine house to receive them in.—Would you think I was the sort of person to produce 'shilling shockers' full of blood-curdling delight? And I mustn't introduce fact—people are scared at fact—you must dress it up and make it look pretty. The real is too tragic. Why should I plod on with it, if there were not so many little mouths to feed? As it is, I go on producing, with confidence in my own mediocrity, knowing it to be just the mediocrity which pleases the people. My dear, I don't deceive myself—no mysterious ways are revealed to *me*, no new com-



binations. I trot on like a hack over the old beaten paths, worn with the patient footprints of other hacks before me, and such poor renown as I have won, such scraps of knowledge as I have picked up by the way—are worth nothing, nothing at all!”

“If everyone were as useful in the world as you are!” cried Zina, who had already poured out her trouble to Mary, exaggerating the gravity of the case, and had received the best sort of sympathy, which was a dose of common-sense.

“I should not plod on,” said Mrs. Carruthers, “if we were not straitened in circumstances, but I am not one of those who believe that the ‘Lord will provide,’ when ordinary human means have not been tried to avert a disaster. That is nonsense. We must do our best, and *then* we may ask for help. It would be hard to have to fight the world alone,” she added, with the unwonted tears coming into her eyes, “even if I were supernaturally gifted; and you know that I never believe I am particularly clever. Sometimes I am sad, and then—

‘My critic Jobson recommends more mirth,  
Because a cheerful genius suits the time.’

“They say they are going to form a society of critics—perhaps that will help us. Who knows? If we could only look to someone whose criticism would be a real criterion—a brevet-mark of merit—but then you know with *me* that there must be the guinea stamp as well; and it *is* humiliating for me to have only to think of what will sell,” she added with a very wry face. “But it is not worth being woe-begone about—it is my own fault—I have no pigments with which to paint, like your absolute reds, yellows, and blues, and I have no time to grind my colours—half the mischief is a want of time.”

Zina too was somewhat unwillingly taking her part in all this pushing and struggling which was



so new a thing to women—this beating of restless hands against a closed door—a door which now and then opened to some of the more importunate but could only admit a few. And every time it opened some of those who pressed most closely to it fell in the rush and scuffle beneath the feet of the more successful, and were trodden down till the life was crushed out of them; whilst newcomers, undeterred by the misfortune which had happened to their neighbours, were continually swelling the crowd—the cruel crowd which, undismayed, trod corpses under foot, and pressed on—ever on—in the terrible warfare for fame and bread. And what was it, after all, even if fame did come to them, a year or two, and then the grave and the silence of oblivion. So thought Zina while still haunted by the morbid melancholy of past experiences. But day by day she was growing stronger, and looked at things with different eyes.

Her youth, and her good constitution had already conquered, bringing her calm and refreshing sleep, and it was now some time since she had lain sleepless through the hours of the nights in a wide-eyed fatigue which compelled her to read to stifle the thoughts chasing each other through her fevered brain. She prided herself on the philosophy taught by her father, and considered that it was *her* turn to speak cheerily to the over-worked high priestess whose duty it was to minister to the *bourgeoisie* of virtue. For it was not often that the brave little woman allowed herself to wander into these helpless personal digressions. And Zina, who had been wonderfully successful with her own decorative work, looked at her for a minute without answering, the catch in her friend's voice making her own throat ache with sympathetic pain. Mary Carruthers sat watching the fire burn itself out, and thinking how often in her girlhood she had built fairy-tales as she



looked into the dying embers, and dreamt of success. Life was not so much of a fairy-tale now, with her big baby downstairs needing his luxuries, the little ones upstairs clamouring for their numerous wants, and the middle-class public which she had undertaken to amuse, the biggest baby of all, and the most imperative, calling, "Dance for me, pipe for me, transport me into fairyland and make me forget my worries."

"Do you think," she said, with a half-hysterical laugh, "that I like having to initiate people into the mysteries of bone-boiling and bill-reducing? Oh, how gladly would I be rich! It was not only for my husband's sake that I came here, but because I wanted to be revitalised in some fresher air, instead of being a mere cockney hack; but sometimes it seems to me as if my scribbling is still a paltry waste of time."

Zina tried in vain to remind her of her attempts to remedy crying abuses, and to aid the weak in their battle with the strong; and said it was a good thing to have had no part in the clever and corrupting books written by some of her sex. Mary only shook her head. There was something comical in the poor little woman trying to appraise her own value coolly and critically—her place in the 19th century compared to the ages which had preceded it, her relativity even to the future, in which the race and the appreciation of the true duties of womanhood would be more perfect—and saying, with a determined shake of her head, "I am outside the ring of the people who are really worth anything, and it *is* more or less a ring now, both in literature and in art; I am bound to turn out trash to please my publishers; they say the public like it, and the people at the bookstalls like it; they must have that sort of stuff—if *I* did not provide it somebody else would."



Meanwhile, Zina herself was no longer sitting in listless indifference. Her want of will and want of nerve-power had disappeared. Not content with her decorative painting, she had taken again to the studies which she had pursued in Rome—the only difficulty being that Mary Carruthers had to furnish her model for a saint.

Now, though it would have been difficult to find a woman whose method of living was more conformable to the teaching of Christ, Mary Carruthers did not make a good saint. You could not fancy a saint who had once had piquant features and who was now faded and pinched after a weary struggle for bread.

„Saints must always have long noses and look down on the ground; you couldn't fancy the beatings of their hearts quickened one bit; you are quite sure from the look of their faces that they have sluggish circulations” said Mary, dissatisfied when she caught a glimpse of her own face. “Yet you paint in the right way. The secret is to paint for the mere love of one's art; as one would paint if one were the only being in the world who had the gift of sight, and as if a trembling took possession of one till the thing which one saw was recorded on canvas. *You* will make your mark in the world.”



## CHAPTER XIV.

### "THE COMMON ROUND."

SO the two women mutually comforted and encouraged each other. It was a case, as Zina said, of "caw me and I'll caw thee," though never was there a truer illustration of George Eliot's words, that "opinion" is a "poor cement" between human souls.

Mary's exalted ideas had ceased to interest Zina, who only thought of them as human fictions, valid for mental states other than her own. And amongst the bitter recollections, which lowered her when she thought of them, was that of her hour of humiliation when she had called on the dead to help her. No savage, as she told herself, could have debased himself more absurdly.

"Oh! my dear, my dear," Mary had said to her friend on her first arrival—"it is terrible to hear you talk so. Anything rather than to allow yourself to dwell on the mere material side of existence! I do not need anyone to prove a future life to me. I



*know* it," she cried, looking up with her clear eyes, and a confident smile which from any other woman would have seemed to Zina in her present mood like irony.

But Mary dropped her voice, so fearful was she of hurting by word of hers that sensitive great-eyed creature of whom in her prosperous days, when she came to her with outstretched hands, smiling face, and beautifully dressed, she had conceived so great an admiration, and of whom even now she stood a little in awe.

"Dear Lord—help her in thine own good time—for I can do nothing," prayed the elder woman. "Let not the hardness of Thy creatures turn her against Thee."

And when the blossoms re-appeared on the trees, and the voice of the cuckoo was heard again in the fields, a softening of the heart came to Zina. Mary's optimism did not seem so strange to her at that season of the year.

How could any painting, any music or any poetry render the effect of the sap of the spring, the sense of intoxicating life, the mystery of birth, the ravishment of existence? What art could interpret the tones of those exquisite greens, and those blossoms on the trees which stooped to meet the blossoms on the flowery meads?

The chestnut leaves were just unfolded from their sticky buds, fully out, but limp and hanging vertically as if wearied with the effort of birth; the foliage of the sycamore was emerging from dainty sheaths, the pear and cherry trees were in bridal white, the apple-blossom beginning to flush rosy red, and the lilac deepening in colour before its clustered tassels were shaken out—clusters so difficult to paint when the beauty of a flower is made up of many sweet-scented units. And besides all this the flute-like notes of the blackbird and the merrier trill of the



chaffinch were beginning to make fresh revelry round Mary's house. And Zina felt as if she might be happy if she could only forget the past, and be satisfied with the mediocrity of the family life around her. For, after all, Mary's home *was* a little unsatisfying for one who yearned after the ideal. The small troubles and worries of everyday life absorbed Mrs. Carruthers as they absorb the majority of wives, and there were days when Zina longed after something more cultured than even the Professor's society.

She was hardly able to keep her temper when she found that Mary's best sealskin jacket had to be cut up to make a fur-lined coat for the Professor, or that the old pedant was taking advantage of his too-confiding wife, and threatening her with giving up that effort of will which Schopenhauer had declared to be necessary to life.

"If he were to cease to will!" said Mary with tears, whilst Zina answered irritably,

"Don't let us talk nonsense, I should like to make a bonfire of the whole of that dismal philosophy! The gospel of despair, and propounded by a wretch who wore out the patience of his own mother, and kicked the only other woman who was good enough to tolerate him down the stairs. A gospel ever so watery would be better than that!"

She was determined to take no part in the attempt to make out that life is worse than it was supposed to be, and tried to shake herself out of a dull disgust for which she told herself she had no excuse, with the noisy and sometimes squabbling children (was it their fault—did not all children squabble?) and the selfish husband of whom Mary invariably made the best. It was so good of her friend to continue to offer her any asylum—that she, being in the case of a beggar who had no right to be a chooser—did not like to acknowledge, even in her



most depressed moods, the dulness, induced by the domestic interior, which occasionally came upon her.

She had seldom joined in the cry of emancipated women, but the Professor throned in state with his family worshipping him excited her irony as well as her laughter. Long afterwards she was vexed with herself for attaching so much importance to the small eccentricities caused by the weakness of his health. He coughed when he wanted anything; he made cabalistic signs pointing to the door or to the various articles of food, and it was understood that his children were to interpret these signs.

Zina had her own private opinion that the state of his health would have been better if the floors had not been covered with cocoa-nut-matting or the doors supplied with india-rubber fastenings in deference to his acute nervous system.

Poor Mary was continually waging warfare with her neighbours because a dog barked or a cock crowed in a neighbouring garden. But when Mary's children were relieved from the presence of their father, they all talked together and clamoured for the same things.

To the wife and mother it always seemed as if her husband and children were perfect, but Zina could not be expected to see them through such rose-coloured glasses.

Why did James Carruthers always find such fault with small things? He looked picturesque enough, with his Aaron beard, and long melancholy face, but his constant complainings were like droppings calculated to wear out a stone? And why were the children, who had made such a picturesque group with their mother—when Zina had occasionally visited them—so difficult to live with? Why did they interfere with one's palette and lose one's best brushes? Why had they such loud unmusical voices, why did the maid-of-all-work go about with a dirty face



and why did Mary herself have sometimes ink on her fingers?

Zina felt that Mrs. Carruthers was braver and stronger than herself, but for that very reason she could scarcely expect her friend to sympathise with her fastidious dislikes.

Mary's own troubles were rarely acknowledged, or found the ready relief of tears. The drops were easily brushed away, and she was brave again.

Thus it was that Zina could not help welcoming a letter, kinder in tone than usual, which came from Eva Capern, saying that she was suffering from a nerve-breakdown owing to the fatigue of too much dissipation, and that her London physician had ordered her to travel and to cheer herself up as well as she could with perpetual change of scene.

Her husband, who seemed to be always busied about money matters, had gone off to America to see about some investment which caused him anxiety. Eva wrote that she did not expect him back till the autumn, and that perhaps it was all the better, as she was too knocked up to be a pleasant companion to anyone. Yet as Mr. Capern could not accompany her, she counted on Zina, and took it for granted that she would not be so unamiable as to desert her in the emergency.

"She used to be very difficult to deal with, but she can have nothing more to do with pride *now*, situated as she is," said Mrs. Capern to herself with unconscious vulgarity, as she wrote her note. "She is leading a make-shift sort of a life and must be glad of the chance of a change from it. It is really provoking to think how many good chances she threw on one side, and now people reflect on *me*, as if *I* had thrown her off."

James Carruthers was just then weaker than usual, and Zina, who had begun to fear that her protracted stay might be a drag upon her friends,



fell in with Eva's proposal, the more so that Mary urgently recommended it, declaring that a visit to the Riviera, Italy, and afterwards to Switzerland—for that was Mrs. Capern's programme—would be the very thing for Zina.

Eva received her somewhat coldly, though she had written gushingly, and Zina, who had intended to take up the acquaintance just as she had left it in her father's lifetime, suddenly "dried up," as Mary's boys would have said, at the reception which was unexpected, and evidently intended to put her in a new position.

"Your appearance is more presentable than could have been expected, considering how you have been hiding yourself," said Eva with a shrug; "but you must not refuse to let me give you some new dresses—and you really want a little feeding up; you'll soon be diaphanous at this rate; you look as if you could cast no shadow." Eva herself was by no means diaphanous in spite of her "nerve-break-down," and her hair seemed to have grown yellower, and her cheeks a little pinker.

Zina declined the offer of the dresses, wondering somewhat cynically what the hidden motive could be which made Eva long for her company. Possibly it was to provide herself with an effective foil in beauty of a darker and severer, as well as a thinner type, possibly to furnish her with an opportunity for patronising. It never occurred to Zina to reflect that, whatever her antecedents might be, her appearance was eminently respectable, and that she, at least, would not need rose-coloured blinds for the windows of her sitting-room, in the hotels in which Mrs. Capern would want her for a companion, whilst her respectability might give a touch of decorum to Eva's follies.

Mrs. Capern's laugh was strange and false, as she said, "You cannot possibly go on supporting your-



self by this miserable painting. We must find you a husband—an eligible parson, you know—to make the best of both worlds. Oh, I forgot, your father did not believe in that sort of thing, and neither did you; but of course you will keep that to yourself when we travel. It would not sound well, and I have always thought there must be a sense of security in having a clergyman-husband to get one out of any difficulties, and pave one's way to heaven."

Zina's eyes flashed, but she had learnt from Mary to be tolerant. Nor did she need to subject herself to much of this sort of talk. If she were to accept Eva's offer, and find her panacea in travelling—trying to patch up the strength which had certainly been impaired—she knew well enough that it would not do for her to be thin-skinned. But she was obstinately determined to accept no presents from Eva, and even insisted on taking her old valise with its ragged, worn-out leather, gaping at the sides, the only box she had left for herself after the sale of her father's furniture. She preferred to travel as the poor dependant, if she were to travel at all.

Eva had to comfort herself with the fact that the hand baggage was more presentable—the cloaks and umbrellas being covered with a wrapper which Zina had embroidered herself. The latter had to cure herself of the habit of being easily jarred. And though there was that in Mrs. Capern's manner which reminded her of the fact that she was one of the disinherited, driven out as an exile from a luxurious home—a recollection which she had lost at the Carruthers' house, where there had been nothing to remind her of it—she was conscious of being glad to avail herself of the change. It gave her almost a feeling of ingratitude to Mary to acknowledge that she was glad, even when she had to wait upon the *soi-disant* invalid with her wraps and cushions on the Calais boat, where the sea—not



monotonous in tint as some of our seascapes represent it, but changeful as the wind and flying cloud above it—brought light to her eye and colour to her cheek. She began already to feel a different woman when, as Mrs. Capern's companion, she drove through the thronged Boulevards.

In the old days she had not been partial to Paris, which had seemed to her like the great bustling mart of the world, but now she saw it with different eyes. The crowd of well-dressed people was amusing, and even the sop fronts were exciting.



## CHAPTER XV.

### THE ANDREA DEL SARTO.

LONG years had passed since Zina had travelled, as quite a young girl, and had taken her lessons in painting at a studio in Rome, and she was astonished to find how little the years had changed her. There were the same quick pulsations of her heart, the same excitement of her lively brain, the same sense of exhilaration in the presence of something new, though she had told herself that she could never feel in the same way again. The thrill of wonder was still as great as when she had looked forward to her coming life. For she was still young enough to be the victim of moods; too young to be world-weary; and too energetic to be tired of the life which she believed to be her only one, looking into the future with many a pang of doubt. There is nothing so mercurial as this sense of youth, which is not, after all, so much a matter of age as it is dependent on keeping the links between man and nature unsevered.



Zina was acutely alive to all those manifestations of nature which affect our senses and stir our blood. And as she passed with Mrs. Capern along that wonderful fringe of coast, which lies basking like a flower-bed between the mountains and the tideless sea, with the air clear, and the sun bright—the land of pine-forests, of aloes, and of palms, with the deciduous vegetation beginning to stir into green—she seemed to hear Goethe's words, "Children, turn back to Life; let the fresh air dry your tears!" She no longer looked back with morbid self-reproach upon the scenes connected with her father's death-bed; her common-sense laughing to scorn the nervous fancies caused by over-fatigue and her conscience reminding her that her motives had been blameless. And she no longer allowed herself to regret the defection of Stephen Dewe; that he suspected her was proof enough that he had not been worthy of her.

She congratulated herself on the fact that Eva Capern's illness did not interfere with the rapidity of her travelling. Cannes, Nice, Mentone, Monte Carlo, San Remo—all were visited in turns; then Eva was still restless, hurrying on past the Maritime Alps to Florence and Venice. All was delightful to Zina; nothing came amiss, not even the less comfortable bedroom which sometimes fell to her share, after Mrs. Capern and her maid had been housed—with red-bricked floor, cold to the feet, and representations of pert little Cupids on the roughly-painted ceilings, or a brazier of coal for a fire. The wooded mountains, the tall campaniles, the olives with their silvery underleaves, the oleanders, the orange-trees with their golden fruit, and even the melancholy cypresses, all sang the same song, "Children, turn back to Life!" The enthusiasm handed down since Sappho sang the divine wood-song that "Hesiod and Homer heard," seemed to inspire her heart and carry her back to the old simple times.



Everything was fresh and new; the little houses which looked like cardboard decorations, the oxen such as the ancients bred, the women with their distaffs—too utterly foolish and behind the times, but idyllic with rural life; the bees murmuring from the thymey hills; the boys and girls singing antiphonal songs, as they drove their mules into the vineyards, munching figs and bread; the old-fashioned agricultural instruments instead of modern steam improvements; the scythes, which needed sharpening and yet glittered like children's toys; and all these simple-hearted people, sleek and merry enough to upset the theories of modern political economists.

"The great thing is to be healthy both in mind and body," she wrote to Mary. "No doubt you will be vexed with me, but more than ever I am inclined to envy the ancient Greeks, whose very religion was a joyous one, and well free from the tormenting maladies of cynicism and disillusion."

Leaving the villages and reaching the cities seemed almost like returning to the evils of our more complicated civilisation; but here again were the old-world associations—the cathedrals with deep blood-stained glass, the sweet marble faces, spared by the iconoclasts, sleeping unmolested through the ages, with a wealth of gilding and fioritura even on the tombs. Zina had been familiar years before with the pictures and statuary of Florence, but whenever she could creep away from Mrs. Capern, who was somewhat *exigeante*, she would hug herself into delicious forgetfulness of all past vexations, feeling how small and how fanciful had been many of her morbid tremors, in the presence of the Raphaels the Titians, the Murillos, the Botticellis, and the Ghirlandajos.

There are periods of spiritual convalescence after some of the fevers of life, which are as delicious in



their way as physical convalescence. And Zina was recovering, slowly, tranquilly, dreamily, yet delightfully in these restful hours of liberty.

It was easy to gain time for such liberty before Eva had left her bedroom, for Eva's toilette mysteries were becoming more and more elaborate. Thus it happened one morning that, seated amongst the art treasures in the Tribune of the Uffizi, after satiating herself with beauty, she began to look round at her fellow-creatures. For if the infinite variety of nature had attracted her on her travels, the uncertainty and unconventionality of life had also attracted her—the people coming and going one knew not whence or whither and the *table-d'hôtes* frequented by types of every nation.

It was her habit to sit and watch the living pictures as well as the painted ones for hours, paying them the subtle compliment of appreciative silence.

These shifting scenes impressed her imagination and amused her. Since she had lived with Mary Carruthers she had become interested in characterisation, that imaginative faculty in the observer which enables him to use the physical as the index of the spiritual. "The question is how a thing or a person strikes you," as she used to say to Mary when she tried to coax her out of her despondent moods. "You may not be able, like George Meredith, for instance, to crystallise the analysis in an image, but you can at least tell how it struck you, *you* individually; and first impressions are generally the truest ones."

Reading and painting after all were not like living human beings, and though her first thought in the mornings for some time past had been, "Oh, to be out and alone with power to draw fresh breaths and look at beautiful things for oneself," yet there were times when she was conscious of a strange new longing for a warmth of contact with some real human soul.



It was not Eva's fault that she could not unbosom herself to *her*—Eva who chiefly lived to be the cynosure of all eyes, and who formed for herself an amusing sort of mental and unreal atmosphere like the heavy odour of patchouli which she always left behind her. She took Eva as she was and never thought of blaming her now.

The Tribune was very full just then. There was the usual gathering of British matrons with their comfortable husbands; of English girls and boys, most of them well-dressed, with good complexions and good teeth, and thinking quite as much about themselves as the pictures; of *piquantes* Frenchwomen, good-natured Dutch, stolid Germans, bright-eyed Italians, and there was a group of other men and women whom she found it difficult to label, as they dressed like the French, looked pleased like the Dutch, and had something of the self-sufficiency of the English, while they talked each language equally well; probably they were Russians. But just as Zina was deciding this knotty point, and thinking how she, of all persons, should make friends with the Russians, whose acquaintance she had only made through Tolstoi's books, and wondering whether she should ever know whether her mother had been a Pole or a Russian, she was startled by finding a pair of dark scrutinising eyes fixed upon hers. The eyes, which belonged to a man of striking appearance, apparently about thirty-five years old, were very dark, corresponding with the hair, which was also dark, but already touched with grey. The figure was distinguished-looking, though it was only of middle height, its erect bearing, as well as the sunburnt complexion, conveying the idea of one who was a practised athlete, and had led an active life. But it was the expression of the penetrating eyes which made Zina feel uncomfortable. Something seemed to pass from them to



her, and she immediately changed her seat, saying to herself, nervously, "I wish people would not stare; it is one thing to make observations quietly as I do, and quite another to stare."

By the time she had changed her seat the stranger was no longer gazing at her. His eyes were fixed on the Andrea del Sarto, and then once more, as if unintentionally, he looked back at Zina.

This time she rose and went quickly out of the room, mentally accusing the man of rudeness. For there was no one to tell her that there was a wonderful resemblance between her own face and that of the Virgin in Andrea's celebrated group. In breadth of brow and the size and shape of the eyes, if the colouring was not exactly the same, and even in the very curves of the lips and set of the head, there was a likeness not to be mistaken. A likeness, and yet a difference, for instead of the peace in the countenance of the Virgin, there was a peculiar, undefinable expression in Zina's face which seemed to separate her from other people as if she had suffered something which does not happen to ordinary women. There was a shade in the eyes, a droop of the lips, and a proud dignity of the whole bearing which gave her what her friends called her "Sphinx-like look." A man who saw her for the first time was likely to be startled by this unexpected expression. There was something about Zina which continually roused curiosity. But politeness generally kept curiosity within bounds, and Zina resented it angrily when she reached the door of the building, and found that by the time she had been given her umbrella, and stood in the open air, she was face to face with this stranger. He lifted his hat as if in apology and walked in a contrary direction, but not before his eyes had again sought hers with the same intentness which startled her before, and she had time to notice that in the full



light they were not only dark but of a deep blue which was unusual.

She was annoyed by the episode, but did not think of mentioning it to Eva, whose jokes on such subjects were amongst the drawbacks of her tour.

"He looked at me intently, I suppose, because he is an artist—artists and doctors have a way of looking at people as if they were lay-figures and one woman was as good as another—we are all possible models; *I* ought to know that," she said to herself as she made her way back to her hotel.

The affair would have been dismissed quietly from her memory, had she not encountered the same gaze a few days afterwards, when at Venice she was floating in a gondola down the Grand Canal past the Church of St. Maria della Salute, to the steps of St. Mark's. She was in the height of her enjoyment in fairy-like Venice, watching the silvery stars come out over the Moorish towers, when the opaline tints had faded and gleams from lighted windows streamed down on the rippling waves, when suddenly she became aware that another gondola was slipping along ghost-like by the side of their own, and was startled from her dream on the bosom of the shadowy waters by recognising the same eyes once more as earnestly fixed on her own.

"Who is *that*? What a handsome man!" exclaimed Eva, who, in one of her prettiest toilettes, was reclining on the cushions in her wax-like beauty. She was in a position of perfect ease, silent and almost somnolent with the *dolce far niente* which suited her so well, listening to the music on the canal, where *contadini* were chanting their ditties in gondolas gaily lit with lamps; but she started up as she asked the question "Did you meet him in London?" with more interest than she had yet shewn in all the architectural glories of the old-world city.

Zina responded faintly, shaking her head and



shrugging her shoulders. She had never any thought of making a confidante of her chaperon, but somehow she felt uncomfortable at the idea that the stranger might possibly be following them, unable to resist the impression which impelled him onwards.

"I never heard his name, but I believe he was in Florence when we were there," she answered, telling all that she could tell. And even that little was drowned in the echo of a chorus, which floating past them with the gleam of coloured lamps from another gondola, jarred on Eva's nerves.

"They sing too loud, and they are awfully, horribly out of time," she cried putting her hands to her pretty ears, as the barcarole of another set of lazy rowers who were rowing away in the distance clashed with the chorus. Had it not been for her languor she would have preferred the Piazza of San Marco with its cafés and colonnades, its brilliant shop-fronts, its ices and its chocolates.

And she forgot to ply her companion with any more questions as they in their turn floated out on the liquid plain of water in the direction of the Lido, where the light was still clear enough for them to see the distant gray lagunes with trembling mysterious shadows, the brilliancy of the stars, and the lanterns glittering in the gondolas.

"Perhaps he found out our names at Florence, and it would be very easy to track us to Venice," Zina could not help thinking, though she tried to dismiss the subject from her thoughts, and to take the same interest as before in the beautiful queen-like city which once had been mistress of the seas. "Perhaps, after all, he is *not* an artist, but some unhappy creature who has never yet seen his ideal, and is never likely to see it."



## CHAPTER XVI.

### A MEETING AT SAAS-FÉE.

IT was a month afterwards. Eva Capern and Zina Newbolt had found their way to the Swiss mountains. There seemed to be no better place of refuge during the warm months, and though Mrs. Capern spoke scornfully of these days of "circular tickets" when one might have to sit next to vulgar nobodies at *table d'hôtes*, she made a virtue of necessity.

Zina had no possible objection. The past had now quite ceased to be a burden on her memory; she could look back upon it more than ever without self-reproach, and could even laugh at herself for the morbid hours in her life when the veil had seemed to be lifted from the face of Destiny, revealing the stern spectre of Despair.

The life in her was so intense that it seemed almost ridiculous for her to recollect how she had once wished to end it all; the *Lebens-Glückseligkeit*,



as the Germans call it, had returned to her in such full force. And she had become so accustomed to wandering that she could make herself at home in almost every hotel, adorning her own little box of a bedroom with her photographs in plush frames, her sketches of the scenery, her pieces of artistic needlework, and her dictionaries and books in different languages. Many of these things had been given to her by Eva, but it was characteristic of her altered mood that she no longer resented Eva's desire to patronise her, or to give her cheap presents.

For even Mrs. Capern and her ways had become more tolerable to her, as she learned by degrees to forget her surroundings, and to adapt herself to the more ordinary phases of life.

And once more, at a *table-d'hôte* at Saas-Fée, when she was joining in the ordinary light chatter of the dinner-table, tackling in German a bearded individual who sat next to her, she became conscious that the same man whom she had met at Venice and Florence was sitting opposite to her and gazing admiringly at her beautifully cut features. The glance was respectful; there was nothing to resent in it; for he, too, was making feeble attempts at conversation with a German Marguerite with long straw-coloured tails of hair, who sat on his right hand—one of a row of schoolgirls who had come up for a few days from Lausanne, and whose mistress, in a stiff black dress, was seated at the end of the table.

She could sympathise with him in these efforts, for she always tried to make friends with the people of different nations, now that she no longer felt like an inhabitant of some distant planet come newly to this Earth, whose time was short, and who was breathlessly studying everything.

There were some of the usual *habitués* of a Swiss Hotel, though the season was only beginning.

There were typical Englishmen of the climbing



sort at the crowded dinner-table: young men who were clear-skinned, clean-limbed, and bright-eyed, with an air of independence which proclaimed them equally at home in all parts of the world. But the new comer was not a typical Englishman. He never relapsed into the cold and reserved islander, but addressed the people around him apparently with equal indifference, drawing one after another into conversation—Zina amongst the rest, leaving her no excuse for not answering him with that dignity and repose of manner and that perfect self-possession which had been characteristic of her in her best days.

She could not know that he was like a billiard-player, who by long practice and skilfulness of hand could calculate the exact angle at which his ball would rebound, and that all the world was a sort of billiard-table on which he liked to play; nor that while it pleased him to pass for a man of culture, he was capricious, fanciful, and even a little disdainful, expecting women to like him the better for his cynicism.

“What a goose I was to imagine that Mr. Layton stared at *me* more than other people! Probably what happened at Florence was purely accidental,” she said to herself after a day or two, during which time George Layton had managed to secure the seat which was next to her at the *table-d’hôte*, and she had taken him into confidence about a good many of their fellow creatures who afforded her amusement. Such, for instance, as the Dutchman who made his bow as if pulled by strings like the cardboard dolls they sell at fancy bazaars, or the dear good English matrons with stiff erections on their heads which they dignified by the name of caps, but which invariably made the foreign ladies shrug their shoulders and whisper “*Voilà l’Anglaise*,” when one of them entered the room.

“There are various types amongst Englishwomen,” he said sententiously, not thinking it necessary to



explain that just now he was spending a good deal of his time in trying to analyse the harmonious impression which the mere appearance of this unconventional countrywoman of his had left on his imagination. Had he done so it is possible that she would have explained she was not entirely of English blood. For he understood the art of drawing people out, with a perception which was more lively, owing to the habits of travel, than it generally is under the murkiness of English skies, and he knew the stimulating influence of the friction of mind with mind. Thus it happened that in the course of a day or two—during which Eva had not been idle, but had found out that Mr. Layton was not only a large landed proprietor in England, but was connected “with some of the best people”—George Layton had also made his inquiries. He had not only discovered that Miss Newbolt had suffered, and that there were times when her voice had a tremor of pain in it still, but that she stood so very much alone in the world, that the gay little woman who patronised her and gave herself airs about her, would be glad to see her happily married, if it were only to free her conscience from any feeling of responsibility.

The little chaperon, who was ready to flirt with anyone, was of a type as nauseous as it was familiar to George Layton. He hated her seductive smiles as he hated her style of dress, which was too showy for the mountains. He despised her artificiality as he despised her shallow pretensions to an intellect she did not possess. In the “set” in which he had mixed from early manhood, women more or less like Mrs. Capern were as common as blackberries in September. He invited them, he made much of them, and talked against them, behind their backs. But there was an absence of filigree about the other woman, and she held him in conversation, unconsciously expectant of what she would say next. Her



efforts to elude him piqued his vanity. For she still pursued her study of painting, escaping from other people whenever the *exigeante* Eva would allow her to do so, and making no secret of the fact that she would probably be dependent on this art for getting her bread.

Zina had been accustomed to climb the easier ascents, hampered a little by her palette and paint-box, in search of picturesque *châtets* and sunset effects. And it seemed to be one of the curiously fortuitous circumstances connected with her constant meetings with Mr. Layton, from the very time she had first come across him in Florence, that he too should be one day climbing up to these picturesque *ehâlets* just as she was putting the last touches to her work. She had long ceased to attribute these meetings to anything but the purest accident, and only laughed as she stretched out her stiff fingers, cramped from the long use of the brush, to which she had been so little accustomed during the freedom of the last few months. It was a long, low laugh, very pleasant to his ears. For, as she told him, she liked painting in the open air. It was so different from the foggy days when her brain had often been weary, and when, in spite of Mary's encouraging criticisms, she had so often felt as if the realisation were sadly different from her first idea.

"I suppose it was hereditary laziness. I had been brought up to do nothing, but I used often to feel in England as if I could throw paints and brushes into the fire."

"Women are easily tempted to give up; owing no doubt to the want of education which for centuries retarded their evolution," he answered.

No one could have detected the slight inflection, almost amounting to irony, in the voice, or the sentiment, kept to himself, that women were *now* being



over-educated, but that the social vanity and the pettiness of the sex would make it impossible for them ever to do much. He smiled at Zina, as he gathered up her sketching materials and offered to carry them home for her, with a smile which, if it had been properly interpreted, would have said that if she expected to succeed she would be overrating herself very much, but that to discourage her would be analogous to crushing a butterfly. He need not have been afraid. She was weary of flattery, and rather liked the trenchant way in which he spoke.

"Hemmed in—circumscribed—with the forces of nature against us—what can most of us do?" he said, looking round at the mountains; "it is to the incapable that things seem easy. The incapable like the sham picturesque, the weakly and washily pretty, and hate the work which is not recognised, the labour which never shews."

After that they had a good deal of talk about Turner, Cox, Stanfield, and De Wint; the amateur photographers who soiled their fingers with chemicals and so seldom produced anything like a landscape after all, because photography could not bring mind to bear upon nature, and the weak daubs which were so constantly exhibited in public picture-galleries. And though her new friend's passion for criticism seemed to Zina carried to an extreme, so that he was always able to narcotise himself with this criticism, she did not guess that in his secret heart he thought such talk more or less "drivel." It was not his way to be expansive with women; he preferred to play with them, and, if possible, to "take the lead" with them.

Yet Zina was a new experience to him. He scarcely knew whether to take her seriously or not, when she said, looking at him with the clear eyes which made many people lower their own,

"It is worth painting a little if only with the



hope of learning to *see*; the majority lose so much. But the worst of it is I never can express the quarter of what I see. And what is the use of seeing or hearing things unspeakable when you are dumb like the old Jewish priest, directly you want to share your visions with anyone else. My best efforts are always like stammering speech."

"It depends upon whether the emotion is genuine, as it seems to be with *you*—or whether one has to get the thing up. I am not an enthusiast," he answered somewhat lamely. He was puzzled and at the same time amused. There was an intellectual force about her which, though it might have repelled him under other circumstances, gave piquancy to his pursuit of her. It was real and unaffected. Her youth had been passed amid the "snows of science," she had seen a little of the world, and had been disenchanted like himself with its pettiness. She often despised what other women admired.

He was much inclined to laugh in his secret heart when she stood drawing deep breaths as she looked at the landscape, and when she confided to him that it hurt her to hear the silly remarks made by the majority of people at the sight of beautiful scenery—and how the "*Wunderschön!*" so constantly repeated in varying keys by the Germans began to jar on her. It seemed to her only possible to enjoy in silence or in the presence of some sympathetic person, who could stand still and speechless like herself, thrilled by the same emotion. He took care to act the part of that sympathetic person, discussing with her the mystery of that great earth-movement which had called these mountains into existence, the dislocations, and the metamorphism of original structure. He tried to impress her by talking very learnedly about these geological mysteries, but he found that she knew more about the earth-crust than he did.



"She makes no pretensions, but, properly trained, she would be the Ninon of Intelligence," he said, a little satirically, quoting Balzac. And yet his intercourse with her had all the charm of a voyage of discovery, for he was continually finding out new powers in her which others had not detected. Owing to her father's prejudices, she had never been taught to sing; and yet once, when he ventured out to meet her in the woods, he had been attracted by a song which seemed to him one of touching beauty. The singer was coming nearer to him, the trees still hid her; but her voice was growing louder, and, though it was untrained, it was true and sweet, soaring like a lark in the upper notes, with the possibility of a rich timbre in the lower ones.

"You did not tell me you were musical!" he said, feeling like another Columbus as he sauntered up to her, and relieved her of the sketching materials which he often carried home for her now.

And then he was a good deal surprised at the sudden cloud which came **over** her brow. "Do not accuse me of being musical," she answered. "I used to think of music as something that could awaken grand and generous impulses, and make one feel nobler, stronger, better. But I was mistaken. Nero loved music. My father was right. He would never have me taught music; he distrusted musical people."

It was these sudden changes of manner, this sense of mystery about her, making him feel as if he were coming in contact with an unmapped country, which enhanced her fascination. Her very footfall was characteristic—firm as well as light—dignified and yet quick—with an unconscious grace of movement, unlike that of other women. And these changes in her expressive face, from the softness of Andrea del Sarto's Virgin to the grand and severe outlines which it could assume in repose—suggesting the transition period between the sculpture of Egypt



and the more delicate outlines of Phidias—equally attracted him. He, who enjoyed his directing power as a man, wished to have the moulding of this enigmatical creature, whose simple dress was the expression of herself, varying from day to day, and whose features, when they suddenly softened with a glow on her cheeks, had even a greater charm than when she stood, as she did now, with her head thrown a little back, and something powerful but almost cold in its outlines, as she cried, “I distrust musical people.”

“Then thank Heaven I am not musical,” he said in his secret heart. For the longing to win her had become wild and irresistible, and he was a man who had never been used to control his desires.

Her first intuition had been correct; he had tracked her from Florence to Venice, and from Venice, later on, to Saas-Fée, and—though he had not thought it wise to force his society on her at once, and had scarcely liked to acknowledge even to himself how he had run the woman to earth—he had managed to acquaint himself with all her movements, and had lived for no other purpose since the day he first saw her.

He had known so many women that his taste had become jaded; he had thought himself acquainted with every conceivable type; but now he had found out for the first time that his ideal woman must be strong as well as agile and graceful; with her heart and intellect in unison; cheerful as well as melancholy, as the mood took her—one of Zina’s greatest charms consisting in these varying moods.

Zina had suspected nothing of all this herself; but Mrs. Capern had divined it, and was ready enough to play into George Layton’s hands.

It was too evident that she did not wish to be saddled with the care of Zina long, and her openly avowed desire to get her well married had at former times been far from flattering, yet on this occasion



she managed her cards as skilfully as Mr. Layton.

"Nothing," as she sometimes said to her intimate friends, "can be so *gauche* as what your blunderers please to call straight-forward speech—as if language were not given us to conceal our thoughts." Eva's philosophy was not deep; it could be summed up in a few sentences.

"If you want to gain a favour never ask it directly; go round and round and you will gain your point. If people's talk shocks you, never let it be seen that you are offended by it. If you wish to be treated on an equality by millionaires take care never to let them guess that you are poorer than themselves. Drop your pretty speeches about like pearls from the lips of a poet, but never trouble your conscience about meaning them. And, above all, if you want to humour anyone who is stubborn or prejudiced, pretend to think as he or she does, and never contradict."

In accordance with these principles, Eva—assuming the airs of invalidism, and professing herself unable to walk any distance with Miss Newbolt—lent her ready assistance to plans for mountain expeditions in which she declared herself unable to take part.

It is true that she would not have been Eva, had she not compensated herself for her dulness by playing out her own *rôle* to perfection in the *pension*—a *rôle* which was alternately languishing, sentimental, and sensational, and which enabled her to bring her eye-batteries to bear on the youngest as well as the oldest men in the hotel, reducing a few of them to a state of slavery.

To do her justice—when she took the trouble to exert herself—Mrs. Capern could be a pleasant talker. Since the day when she had known how to adapt herself to Stuart Newbolt's mental atmosphere by picking up scraps of information and bringing them in at the right moment, she had laid



herself out for the art and could explain a few of its mysteries. One of her plans in drawing the younger men out was to get each of them to talk about himself, his own prospects in life, his special talents, and his disappointments. She knew how to sympathise at the right moment, and to prophesy in her softest tones a brilliant future for the disappointed hero. And as the pretty woman with her languid ways roused herself to condole with him, to flatter, and to encourage, as if her interest were reserved specially for him, each lad in turn was wild with admiration.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### A MOUNTAIN-WALK.

NO after-recollections could dim the memory of some of these expeditions. There was one in which a party, consisting of a German family, and two Swiss ladies—old enough to take Zina under their care—with George Layton and a couple of guides, set out for Monte Moro, intending to see as much as possible of the road to Macugnaga. They started at an early hour in the afternoon, passing the little chapel with models of arms and legs hanging upon its plaster-walls to testify to the *naïve* belief in the miraculous powers of St. Joseph. It was a fête day, and as the people were returning from their orisons, Zina stepped in amongst them beneath the shade of the porch, looking at the toy sheep and cows which had been brought as simple offerings to shew that animals had been cured, or at pictures of whole families imploring the saint for healing, with one of the members lying in bed surrounded by kneeling brothers and sisters, and white-bearded St. Joseph



looking down from the clouds ready with his benison. Gothic windows or stained glass were scarcely needed here; the altar-piece, with its tawdry gilding and the doll in crinoline, supplying all the needs of the superstitious mountain people. Above were other pictures, of souls in purgatory—crimson flames shooting out from the nether depths, and winged angels looking down from the glory above.

George Layton stood watching, with a shrug which seemed to say, "Is it not well we are outgrowing these ridiculous delusions of Christendom?" With a mocking laugh he followed Zina; it was a part of her attraction that she was as free as he was to scorn all childish beliefs.

"That old hypocrite is paid to teach that humbug," he said—almost in the words of her own father—as they watched the priest in black garments moving about amongst the women with red handkerchiefs on their heads. "The old rogues could not eke out their living if it were not for the women; but 'a woman believes according to her feelings'—so says Alphonse Karr. It goes without saying that Alphonse never knew *you*."

She disliked him for the quotation, and for the air with which he quoted it. "Oh, you must make excuse for those women," she answered, impetuously. "Think of the storms sweeping over the roofs of these little Alpine villages, and of the stealthy, noiseless snow, choking up the hollows and obliterating all the tracks; think of the perils of those drifts, and the dread of the noiseless avalanche. If *I* were one of those women, I daresay I should be glad enough to cry to all the saints for mercy, and I would make the sign of the cross if I could think it would help me." But her dislike to his sneer at the expense of her sex was only momentary; she had no time to analyse the sentiment.

The groups about the chapel grew smaller and



smaller, for already the party was disappearing from view of Saas-Fée. They had a fairly long walk before them. First a tramp of two or three miles along a flat valley, then a mile by a lake, and afterwards—before the sun set—they had an ascent to accomplish over snow to the top of the pass. The easy walking did not take long, and comparatively soon the little party was climbing the ascent, with the village of Saas-im-Grund floating beneath them, in grey mysterious depths, amid the mist as in mid-ocean. Soon the tops of the houses and the little steeple looked like the masts of ships rising from surging billows. Above them were rocks and crags, with glimpses of *châlets* on the heights, and Zina could gratify her longing to inflate her lungs with the air of the uplands, and drink in the breath of the mountain sides. The light in her eyes grew brighter, her upper lip curled involuntarily.

“It makes one feel it is good to live, and it is very rarely I feel *that*,” she said with a smile, so stirred as to forget her wonted reticence. Layton watched her with interest. He himself would have preferred to rest after the hurried travelling which had been necessary to make him sure of reaching Saas-Fée before Mrs. Capern and her companion could escape him, instead of running the risk of breaking his neck in struggling over passes. But there was not much chance of “breaking his neck” in this simple walk. And the lively feeling in Zina’s face with the expression of her delight, which was so abrupt, as if in spite of herself, were all part of those unconscious changes of manner which made him feel like exploring an untrodden country.

The experiences of the night were merry ones. For when they reached the *châlet* in which they were to sleep, it was found that the rogue of a proprietor had let it over their heads. A number of English people had already taken possession,



and a rubicund face appeared at the window to say it was impossible to make room for anyone else. Mr. Layton, who was spokesman, insisted in reply on accommodation being made for the ladies, whilst for his own part he added that the men would be content with an outhouse. A rumbling was heard within, and the rubicund face—which was now seen to belong to the figure of a stout man in queer *déshabillé* but which reappeared on the following morning clad in the respectable garb of an ordinary English clergyman—retreated after heaping up a bombardment, consisting of pillows and great coats, against the inner door.

The outside room was allotted to the women, but Zina who had little sleep, was stirring early, and longing, if possible, to climb one of the hills, to see the sun rise over the heights. Little sun was to be seen as yet. Instead, were weird shapes, spectral mysteries, and solemn banks of cloud moving on beneath her in a slow, stately way. Here and there were tree-tops peeping through the mist, blue-black pines, and feathery larches, but the trooping phalanx of clouds and shimmering mists seemed to hem her in, separating the little piece of earth on which she stood from the world beneath, whilst above rose a glacier-crown and phantom-like peaks.

Zina shivered. There was a ghost-like and mystic unreality about the place which made her feel as if her presence there were a dream. Or was it that all her previous life—that uncanny story about her poor young mother who had lain dead for so many years in one of the London cemeteries with a cold stone on her breast, that morbid attack of horrors at her father's deathbed, and the defection of the one man for whom, in her false appreciation of his character, she had thought it possible to care—was the real dream?

She could hear the sound of a mountain stream trickling past her like a ghost-melody. She had said



that she hated music, but the passionate exclamation had not been true, and this stream, as it chanted its purling melodies, seemed to entrance her with its siren voice into another dream of possible happiness which should last, not as it had lasted yesterday, for a few brief moments of ecstasy, but till her pulses ceased to beat. Once more the voice of Goethe seemed to urge her, "Children, enjoy life!" The difference between knowing and feeling was always immense with her, and as she stood trembling with a sense of something which she did not understand, and dreading the enslaving of her spirit, she became conscious that George Layton, who had also risen early, was standing by her, gazing at her once more with that intense gaze of admiration which would have attracted attention from the bystanders had he ventured to look at her in that fashion at the crowded hotel.

"You," he said, "have a beautiful idea which is thrilling you with feeling and glorifying your face. Is it the same as mine—that we two mortals are alone in this world, shut away from our kind, and that the little cascade which we cannot see is singing songs to us as it falls into the valley beneath—songs of freedom and happiness—intended only for our ears?"

She moved a step or two back from him, but she did not answer.

At that moment the sun suddenly conquered the mist, illuminating the scene, and bringing into sharp relief every detail, every peak and yawning chasm beneath; the gloomy forests and wild torrents with their foaming spray, the precipices, the ravines, and the *châlets* like pin-points in the distance. She gave a cry of instinctive delight—wide-awake instantly to the fingertips, and quivering with excitement from her head to her feet.

"Ah," he said, "you could not judge of the view



before, any more than you could judge of a person veiled with innumerable veils."

She did not seem to hear him, for still it was as if mysterious fingers were busily occupied undrawing first one intercepting veil and then another, disclosing glimpses both of beauty and terror. For the piece of grass on which she stood was suddenly discovered to be a dome of green, studded with little bushes which shelved down on one side to rust-red crags beneath, below which, far away and quivering through mists, were villages and home-steads like specks in the distance. Above the lizard-like clouds which still clung round the mountain sides were the silver-tipped Alps, the topmost heights still coquetting with the mists, as if eluding pursuit.

"Oh, wait just a minute or two," she could have cried to the vision, "till I can fix in my mind what I would remember."

And then again the relentless clouds, "slow shepherded by the unwilling wind," seemed to close around her, and for the first time she heard Layton's voice saying in a more matter-of-fact way, "It was a good thing I followed you when you left the *châlet*. It would not have been safe for you to be here by yourself."

She had forgotten conventionality—the tears were on her cheek. But at the sound of his voice she seemed to wake up to reality.

"We are no longer alone—" she said with a laugh, "there is life all around us." For it seemed to her in one of her sudden changes of mood, as if she could never again shut out the joy of that Life which was clamouring louder than usual at her door. Something leapt in her veins to welcome it; something in the expression of this man's face seemed to rouse her from her sleeping palace. And then, possibly to prevent the awkwardness of taking further notice of his speech—she stooped to look at a



cluster of flowers suddenly revealed close to the snow.

"It is that rare specimen of gentian," she said, seeing that it was beyond their reach.

In another moment he had swung himself down. It seemed to her, in the instant of horror, that he hung suspended over the yawning chasm; but before she had time to cry out—closing her eyes that she might not witness the worst, in that moment of dread which seemed to freeze her very blood and choke her utterance—he was again on the short grass by her side, the blood trickling from his hand, for he had torn himself with the sharp stones to get her the flower she coveted.

"Oh!" she cried, when she recovered her power of speech; "how could you do such a thing, to risk your life for so little? It takes away all my pleasure. It makes me shudder."

It was true, she was trembling in every limb at the recollection of that "Force"—blind and terrible she thought it—of which the phenomena around her were only the expression. And to hide her nervous excitement, she added almost sharply. "I have read of such things in novels—but I never admired them."

He might have told her that it was not risking his safety, that the feat only required steady nerves and practised muscles, and that he was an accomplished mountaineer. But he preferred to leave her in her delusion, and said, as he offered her the gentian. "You have conquered me, subjugated me; and it is my delight to obey your wishes, and yet you are cold—you are frigid, and care nothing for my distress."

Her woman's heart was going out to him as she looked at his bleeding hand, and he pursued his advantage, making no attempt at binding it up, but letting the drops of blood fall on the grass. "Whether or not you choose to crush and maim my life, to throw it in scorn from you, I shall always



love you. I have loved you from the moment I first saw you, though I am a woman-hater—averse in every way to your sex.”

At that moment he scarcely knew that he was lying when he called himself a misogynist. It was true that he had learnt to despise many of her sex; true also that every fibre in him was thrilling at the sound of her voice when she answered in uncertain tones, “Give me time; it is scarcely fair to take me by surprise like this. Let me go back to the others, and forget what you have said.”

An inner voice told him that the time she was wishing to give him would be just what was needed to enable him to wrestle with his passion, and yet in his present tumult of anguish and desire there was something seductive and unusual in this quaint reserve. She had let him unbosom himself to her, but she had told him nothing in return; and yet ninety-nine penniless girls out of a hundred would have caught at the offer he made.

“I can wait for your answer,” he said, “I have plenty of patience.”

Even then there was an irritating suggestion in his manner which reminded her of the old saw, “Everything comes to the man who waits.” Zina felt it in spite of herself, chafing a little at the idea that it was a foregone conclusion that she should accept this man’s suit, though she had so often in the old days railed against marriage, and though her conscience told her she ought to be more careful than ever of any step she took, since Stephen Dewe had proved so unworthy of her affection.

But throughout the excursion which followed there was no escaping from his tender speeches. She was chary of her own words and indulged in no more raptures, even when they came upon the best view of Monte Rosa, and could look down over the Macugnaga valley. The climbing was difficult and



new to her, so that it would have been useless to pretend she was not glad of assistance. The descent had to be accomplished with caution, and George Layton's strong arm was the more valuable in emergencies because one of the guides had proved to be drunken, and the other was occupied in attending to the demands made upon him by other ladies.

George Layton's years of training, which had accustomed him to mountain-work, proved to be even more useful than he had anticipated. For Zina was suddenly nervous in a way she would not have liked to acknowledge, and made more than one false step, which might have been disastrous had he not caught her when she was stumbling. On one occasion he caught her rather unnecessarily near to his heart, and there was no one to see or to notice the rich blood mantling to her cheeks; for the curve of the path hid their companions from view, and, over the rugged flanks of the mountains, mists were still floating, sometimes swathing their sides, and making every man and woman look to his or her own footsteps.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A FLIPPANT CHAPERON.

IT never occurred to Eva Capern, and still less to Zina herself, to think that George Layton might have put her in a questionable position by the attentions he had chosen to pay to her in so solitary an expedition. The question of troubling herself too much about the proprieties was one which rarely occurred to Zina. She would scarcely have been able in earlier years to carry on her close acquaintance with Stephen Dewe had she not been constantly associated with men. Her father had always had a large way of looking at these things, and had often laughed at the majority of women for their small conventionalities, their hundred and one prim rules of etiquette, and she had inherited from him his indifference to such trifles.

George Layton was struck more than ever with admiration when she met him on the following day without any hurry of manner or sign of unusual excitement. The perfect self-control of this glorious



creature would have enabled her to treat him as if nothing at all had happened, had he chosen to ignore the words uttered in an episode of passion. But none the less could he guess, by the expression of her speaking face, that the whole world was glowing and different for her, the skies and the clouds speaking a different language, and that even the music which she had professed to hate was appealing to her soul once more as it had appealed in happier days.

He found her in the garden. She had been singing to herself, and a book of poetry lay open on her lap. She was reading a piece of Browning's which she had read a hundred times before, but she perceived new meanings in it which she had never perceived till that day. He sat down by her and took her hand, but at first they did not speak, though latterly these two had been so good at repartee, so ready with impromptu witticisms, that the other people at the hotel would involuntarily listen to them. They had never cared to be brilliant, they had only cared to draw each other out and amuse one another. Yet this morning both were silent, till the man again urged for an answer to his suit.

"Yesterday," he said, "I told you I could wait, but to-day I know and feel I cannot. I feel as if your answer had been already given me, and I am like King Agag—the bitterness of death is passed. Still, I count every day lost till I can call you—Wife."

A nervous thrill of fear shot suddenly through Zina's veins, with a look which it was well he did not see in the dimness of that garden beneath the trees. Till that moment she had been thinking of the tempting vista of work in the life which might be before her in the years which were to come; of the mutual inspiration and soul-communion, the delightful interchange of thought, and the possible losing of self in the being of another, which should



be the characteristics of the highest form of marriage. She had intended to speak to him of all this. But a breath of something unknown seemed to be already blowing across their new intercourse—making her draw her cloak a little closer round her shoulders. She was vexed with him for being so sure of her, and for the sort of easy familiarity with which he used a sacred word. It struck her like a touch of sharp reality. After all, what did she know of him? And why this unseemly haste without recognising the necessity for submission to the forms of outward life?

It reminded her in an uncomfortable way of some Eva's chatter—"how, after all was said, a woman educated as Zina had been, would be mad if she thought to live alone, or in the atmosphere of dreary economy to be found in Mary Carruthers' house; and how if a woman were truly loved she need not trouble to love much in return—all that would come by degrees." Eva, who had heard something of Stephen Dewe's defection had not even hesitated to hint that a new engagement would "wipe out the horror of that other matter."

"Of course marriage is the natural career of all successful women," she had added scornfully, "and to find oneself getting to a certain age and left in the lurch, is—to make a mess of things." The cruelty of the light words came back to Zina and tormented her.

"They none of them want me," she thought, "They have their own houses, and I have none. I am a tax on them"—And—yet—no such unseemly cause should compel her to take a hasty step.

Had she answered yesterday's question too lightly? She had heard the same question before from the lips of the many men whom she had refused. Had she been weak to admit to herself that circumstances had changed? Stephen Dewe had not written; he had rendered himself ineligible,



even if he were to write now, by the fact of his withdrawal when his presence could have been a protection. She smiled bitterly when she reminded herself that his wild expressions of attachment must have been simply a boyish malady. The calf-love had been easily cured—and now that she was not likely to be so often molested as in the old days, this older man's matured devotion pleaded for him. She did not wish to give way to Eva's worldly reasoning, but she was so lonely, so helpless, that she felt her cheek flush and her eyes fill with moisture in the new craving for something which she hardly understood.

Yet it was an impulse to test him which prompted her to say:

"I wish to be good to my kind and to live for large interests—not only those which affect ourselves; that is *my* view of marriage," she said, as she drew the cloak in closer folds over her shoulders.

"Did I not know it?" he cried, in a tone of exultation, "and was it not this which attracted me to you? Wax dolls are antagonistic to me—positively repulsive, and the majority of pretty women are like wax dolls; but there is power in your face. As I see it now, with your head thrown back and outlined against the dark foliage of those trees, I rejoice in its power. You shall teach me to lead a nobler life than I have ever led yet; but the sooner we begin to lead it the better. Why should we wait? We are neither of us in the bread-and-butter stage of existence; we left that behind us a good many years ago. You are alone, and not very happy. It is because of your loneliness that I want to hurry our marriage."

"I have known you so short a time," she urged, with a question in her eyes which he scarcely liked to face, "and how can I be sure that I care for—you enough? Or that you will not tire of *me*?"



"I think I understand," he answered patiently. "It is easy to understand that women of your sort never have very much sympathy with the unreason of passion. But, all the same, you must be sorry for me if I cannot take things quite so coolly."

"The love I should like best," she continued, speaking almost as much to herself as to him, "should—like all other good things—have the element of growth in it—it should strike firmer roots year by year—it should end by glorifying existence—Life should be good with such love—between a man and a woman. But it is just because of that, I think of marriage as an awful experiment."

"You think too much," he said lightly—"you are too ready to bother your little head with high and deep subjects. You should trust more to your intuition, your instincts are sure to guide you rightly. What more can a man tell you than that he too is ready to be guided by any instincts which are good and true?"

She answered somewhat dubiously; perhaps he had scarcely chosen the style of argument likely to be most effective in her case.

In Eva Capern he found an ally who proved to be more diplomatic and able than could have been suspected. Mrs. Capern could not let such a magnificent opportunity slip. If she could have ignored Zina altogether the matter would have been different. But it had been an open secret that Eva had been educated at Stuart Newbolt's expense, when confided to his care by a spendthrift father on his death-bed. For Stuart Newbolt's character had been full of these anomalies. And if Eva could have stopped the mouths of those interfering London gossips who made insolent remarks when they heard that Miss Newbolt had to work for her livelihood, or if she could have silenced the twinges of conscience which reminded her that, in



her own orphanhood, Stuart Newbolt had been good to her, it would have been easier to dismiss Zina in her desolate condition altogether from her memory. In London she had found her absolutely unmanageable when she had planned any scheme especially for her benefit; nor was it very possible to introduce a woman, however beautiful, in deep mourning robes, to be like a skeleton at the feast, and a reminder of mortality in a gay London house.

But Eva prided herself on being a skilful general, and she had not crossed the Alps and marshalled her forces like Hannibal for nothing. She had not toiled for the last few months, and told any amount of pretty fibs about her invalidism, for nothing. As soon as Mr. Layton had appeared on the scene, Eva had remarked that he was undeniably handsome, and that she heard he belonged to a tolerably good family, and had money—a combination which made her determine that he had excellent qualities, a beautiful disposition, and was estimable as a man. She might have wearied Zina by singing his praises, had not Zina's own opinions inclined in the same direction. For the first time it appeared as if it were not without reason that Mrs. Capern made friends with all the young men in the various hotels, training them to fetch and carry for her, and fascinating them by her smiles. For there is safety in numbers, and George Layton, having more than the ordinary English polish, and the faculty of shining in conversation, besides his striking appearance, and his habit of being always well-dressed, contrasted with the others like a sovereign among shillings.

“My dear, you must be hard to please if that man is not good enough for you; he towers like a Saul among the rest of the men—you *are* a fortunate woman!” cried Mrs. Capern in her high-



flown manner, determining not to let such a magnificent opportunity slip.

She was getting weary of exposing her porcelain complexion to the brilliant sunshine of Switzerland, and was secretly sighing after the pretty drawing-room with festooned tussore curtains in which she received visitors on her day at home. It was tiresome to know that the delights of the London season would soon be passing, and yet it had been impossible to ignore the fact that prejudices had been afloat concerning her in her "set", and that the atmosphere had been rather heavily charged with ill-natured conjecture ever since it had been understood that Zina Newbolt was working for her bread. She used an argument which was perfectly true when she remonstrated with Zina, saying decisively, "it is awfully difficult for women of our class to earn their own living," and she was scarcely aware of her own selfishness in telling herself that Zina's marriage to a rich man would open up new sources of amusement for herself, and be the best stroke of luck which could possibly happen for both of them. Nevertheless she admitted that she fully recognised the delicacy of the situation, and even offered to write to London, and get her husband to make all the necessary inquiries, keeping the idea to herself of communicating to Zina that part of the information only which she should think most favourable.

Meanwhile Zina was no longer obdurate. She could not shut her ears to the knock which had come at the citadel of her heart, neither could she turn out the traitor of importunate gladness, which was ready to open the gates. And, if the inquiries were satisfactorily answered, it was decided that the wedding should take place in Switzerland in another three weeks, George Layton having shewn some readiness in fixing that date.

In the normal state of things, Mrs. Capern's deter-



mination to manage Zina Newbolt would probably have defeated itself. Women are proverbially more difficult to be managed by women than by the opposite sex. But the most unmanageable women will suddenly become docile when their own inclinations go hand in hand with their friends' wishes, and so it proved in this instance. The woman who had gone through so much, and to whom the Fates in her former life had seemed to be so unkind, was ready to succumb. She was tired of holding out. If it were a dream, she was dreaming with her eyes open, and had not even the wish, still less the power, to free herself from the spell. She had so thoroughly fallen into the toils, and was so ready to yield without a struggle, that Eva's little fiction of making the proper inquiries in London was sufficient to give her confidence, and a sense of being shielded from any possible harm.

She was not suspicious by nature, and did not for a moment suspect that Eva could be disingenuous enough to write, "After all, the inquiries will make very little difference, for my guardian's daughter, as you know, has a strong will of her own—even stronger than mine—and in this case she has made up her mind. You yourself talk about the folly of remonstrating with women when once they have set their minds on anything in particular. And oddly enough Zina's, inclination squares with mine.

"'You would have been grievously dissatisfied,' she said to me the other day, laughing, 'if I had not married a man who was tolerably rich.' He seems to be rich, clever, and up to the mark of good society. What more can we require? And she for once is wisely obstinate, knowing perfectly well that though I am to *seem* to make these inquiries, I am not to tell her anything which would lead to a rupture. Well, she is intensely inaccurate like nearly all dreamers; she never dates a letter and has no sense



of time, so she can't expect you to give her *very* precise details."

And so the days passed pleasantly enough. Mrs. Capern, who was in reality counting the hours when she should be back in more enlivening society, was amiable in the emergency with that good humour and want of principle which so often go hand in hand. She was making the best of a situation which gave her opportunities for sweet millinery talks, the few necessary articles for Zina's trousseau being purchased by the maid who undertook expeditions to Montreux or Lausanne for that purpose.

Mrs. Capern could be niggardly enough in these purchases, but she was anxious to keep on good terms with Mr. Layton and it won her heart to find that he had a knowledge of what would be needed which seemed to come to him intuitively, and a diplomatic cleverness on which he prided himself, and which she admitted nearly to equal her own. They worked together in favour of a short engagement, Eva emulating that transparent truthfulness in this matter which she usually blamed as so tiresome in Zina.

"I do not wish to hasten you," she said, at the same time managing to convey the impression that to make Mr. Layton wait longer would not only be unwise but embarrassing to herself, and that to linger later in Switzerland would be to demand an amount of self-abnegation from her, hardly to be expected from flesh and blood. Meanwhile, surrounded by young fellows, with whom as usual she condescended to flirt, and elegant as ever in the languor caused by the warm weather, she was never more skilful in her tactics, and smiled sweetly when a letter, which she declared to be all that could be desired, was returned to her with the necessary information from her husband.

Eva Capern had not only no wish to keep minis-



tering to what she would have called Zina's fastidious objections, but she had no occasion to equivocate or to make use of ambiguous phrases, for Zina, easily satisfied for once, questioned her very little. And Mrs. Capern was as contented as she pretended to be, being herself one of the women whose affections, if they possess any, are of the absolutely indiscriminating kind. She was not generally romantically inclined, but her sympathies were evidently with the bridegroom, and she hinted that Zina had been a little unkind in keeping her ardent lover so long waiting for his final answer, and that other women would have thought it foolish to dally with such a chance. In her heart she was somewhat surprised, but reasoned that if the girl were in love she could scarcely expect her perceptions to be as quick, or her judgment as sharp, as on other occasions.

"Of course he thinks *you* far superior to the rest of your species. The spectacles of a man in love are proverbially rose-coloured—ditto with a woman," she said half beneath her breath.

"Oh, I know what you feel, though you do not show it," she added, a little provokingly, her theory being that the only philosophic way of discovering whether women like Zina were in love consisted in reading them backwards, and interpreting their speeches as if they were a kind of puzzle.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

TO escape from chatter of this sort, Zina was thrown more than ever into George Layton's society. It is true that she had seldom been more happy in her life, and though the happiness was not a fact on which she would have enlarged to Mrs. Capern—to whom she generalised, as women are said to generalise when they wish to hide their strongest emotions, shewing an inclination to laugh whenever George Layton was over-praised—yet she was evidently in good spirits, and the time did not lag with her. Her old confidence in her own intuition had so thoroughly returned, that she was not only inclined to think with Eva that all mysteries had been cleared up, but that, if there had been any real mystery from the first, she should certainly have known it by the instinctive antagonism which made her dislike those who were to be distrusted.

Sometimes indeed, when she allowed herself to think of her quickly approaching marriage, her



heart sank a little, and it seemed to her as if she were setting out on a new and exciting voyage to unexplored regions of which she knew little more than Columbus had known of the new world when he sailed for America, or Livingstone of Lake Nyanza when he set out for Africa. There might be all sorts of dangers to be encountered, and she was forced to admit that she had no chart to guide her; she knew little of the previous life or peculiarities of the man she was about to marry, though Eva's successful enquiries had given her to understand that she was about to pledge herself to one who had not only money and good connections, but an unblemished reputation. She had noticed that one of the old maids at the hotel who had been friendly to her before, had cut short all her attempts at conversation lately, with an odd sort of snort of disapproval.

Uncharitably keen-eyed spinsters had indeed seen through Eva as a reckless match-maker, but sharp-tongued as some of the people were, they had hesitated to condemn the girl of husband-hunting.

Then a new shock came upon her. It was three days before the date which had been fixed for her marriage, when, on going into her bedroom, she found a letter lying on her dressing-table, written in a handwriting which she did not recognise. Supposing it to be from one of the tradespeople, she opened it slowly, and read it with absent eyes, till suddenly its full meaning dawned on her intelligence. The letter was anonymous, and affected to be kind.

"Forgive me for the interest which prompts me to write to you even at the eleventh hour. I should advise you to ask some of your friends—male friends who are more to be trusted than the flippant lady who chaperons you—for your own



sake, and before you make up your mind to take the rash step you are contemplating at present. There are many ways of avoiding the legality of marriages in foreign countries. In Switzerland a marriage is not legal between two British subjects, when the English Consul is absent. Enquire for yourself—you will find he is away at present. Ask if you are to be married at an Embassy or Consulate."

She read the letter with a cold thrill; but indignation and anger succeeded to her first sense of alarm. To confide perfectly in anyone was impossible; neither could she believe such unpleasant communications as these. Would not Eva—hating worries of every kind—sneer at her for attaching any importance to such a malign letter, and treat all her questions with cynical indifference? Had not Eva already accused her of being unkind to one who loved her, suspecting mysteries where there were no mysteries to be cleared up? "Do you not suppose that I should keep *my* eyes open? My maid hears all the gossip, and yet never a word has been breathed against Mr. Layton?" Mrs. Capern had said to her a fortnight before. No, whatever torments she might have to endure, Zina would have preferred to conceal the hidden anguish.

Since the engagement had taken place Eva had ceased to patronise her; she had become indeed all sugar-sweetness, but Zina's natural instinct of self-preservation prompted her to keep her pain to herself. Nothing could be more hateful to her than Eva's way of ignoring her, and looking through her instead of at her, when she took her to task for her "ridiculous notions" and reminded her that all men were not moulded on one type, and that every man must be allowed to have his own peculiarities. It was true that Zina Newbolt had not hitherto been



able to afford the luxury of being proud; but Eva's interference had been galling to her.

"I am surely old enough to be able to manage my affairs for myself," she said, ensconcing herself in her armour of reserve, "but I suppose I *must* tell her."

"I don't think she is at all easy to understand," one of the gossips at the hotel had said about Zina, giving up the problem of solving the riddle of her character. "One likes her very much, but there is something which at times makes one feel uncomfortable."

"You would like her to be more conventional, and you despise that *something*," another lady had answered.

Yet all of them had pitied her. No gentleman was with her, and the wits of women of Mrs. Capern's stamp are so often singularly inapprehensive.

Had the anonymous letter come earlier, it might have shaken Zina's confidence, and startled her out of her new happiness. But she had so far made up her mind that, when she read it over a second time, it seemed to her, as it seemed to Eva—when at last she made up her mind to take the prejudiced Mrs. Capern into her confidence,—the concoction of jealousy, malice, and concentrated wickedness, and when she read it a third time she thought it not even worth her attention. "All this is so very silly, so poorly and weakly written—like most anonymous letters, ill-advised, even if well-meaning—if there is a foolish rule of this kind about the Swiss Consul, it is just as likely as not that George did not know it himself," she said to herself, not perceiving that her own wits were confused.

Yet sleep was impossible that night. And, when the intended bridegroom came to see her on the following morning, she determined to put the question to him herself, and to abide by his way of answering.

George Layton drew a sharp breath. His own apprehensions had almost ceased. Now that he



could count the days on his fingers to that of the wedding, it was ridiculous to be met with this mysterious menace, as if at the very last the woman he loved could escape him.

"What ridiculous nonsense they do talk!" he said almost irritably. "Fancy having to delay our marriage for a mere punctilio of that sort! I should have thought you were the last woman to be the slave of convention."

There was a downward inflection in the tone of her voice as she answered.

"You know we agreed long ago that, so long as such conventions are necessary for the well-being of society, we could not be too punctilious about them. If it were only a registry office it would be the same thing, but you told me that you thought as well as I did that all legal rites must be carefully considered."

"Oh for the matter of that," he began, "all these ideas about legal marriage differ in different countries, a Scotch marriage being a mere declaration, and a Roman Catholic one hampered by all sorts of difficulties. Do not let our ideas become confused about the *real thing*—there would be no end to the mischief if we once let ecclesiastics dictate the laws of our marriages."

"But the religious service is optional" she said.

He tried to take her hand and draw her nearer to himself, as he continued, "The truest marriage is a union between congenial hearts—all these conventional enactments will become obsolete in time, but nothing can be obsolete when two are made one in absolute trust and sympathy. What a conventional little woman it is, in spite of priding itself on its freedom of thought! Are women ever *really* free, or are they merely passive creatures? How easy it is to scare them with logic!"

A flame of fire shone in her face, and she drew



back a step or two when he attempted to touch her.

"Answer me as you would answer in the sight of God—did you know of the absence of the Consul when you fixed that special date for our marriage—did you mean to ignore the consulate?"

His breath came and went quickly. The day was not a warm one, but the pores of his skin were so moist that he looked as if he must beat a retreat from the heat. The blood rushed darkly into his face, yet he knew that the crisis was imminent, and he gazed back at her steadily, never moving his eyes from hers.

"Not to have inquired into these things gives people all sorts of suspicions," she continued.

"*What* suspicions?" he asked sternly, changing his bantering tone to that of a man who is outraged, and it seemed as if the harshness of his voice relieved her. "Did you think I was in earnest—that, whatever I might say about the abstract question, it was possible I could deceive *you*, or any other woman who confided in me?—How can you forgive me for supposing you would have preferred to be married according to the rites of the church? I suppose you think I ought to have inquired into this other matter, but I did not know."

"I knew it was a mistake," she said, with a rapid look at him, as she lifted her head. The remnant of the vanishing fire was still shining in her face, but her voice had already softened.

He tried to take her hand and kiss it, he even prostrated himself at her feet, saying in his tenderest tones, "Dear, what did you think—that even if I were a blackguard, I could be such a selfish cur as *that*? I am bad enough, but not so bad or so cruel as my enemies would make me out."

But she was not so easily mollified, and the style in which he spoke jarred on her sensitive nerves. Her eyebrows went up. "I do not believe in anyone



being inveterately cruel," she said beneath her breath, "I know it is the fashion to make a hard, cut-and-dried demarcation between the good and the bad, but I never yet met with a person who was all bad—or all good," she added, sinking her voice to a whisper.

"Would you like to punish me by making me wait? I will wait for months, or years, if you like," he said, still in that deferential tone by which he veiled the struggle in his heart.

"A woman is all the better for having a few foolish fancies—foolish they would be called in men," he was saying to himself; "but women are delicate susceptible creatures, and it is a part of their delicacy to invent torments for themselves." Then he said aloud, "I should like things properly done, as well as yourself—we shall have to wait for the necessary date: it will involve a very slight delay."

She only answered by an exclamation which seemed to be wrung from her. "Oh, what a merciful thing we found it out in time!"

Her emotions were too strongly excited for her to notice that he did not echo the cry. He had thought of her as a prize not to be let slip from mere carelessness, and then—as the difficulties increased—his earnestness and ardour in hunting down the game which eluded him had proved correspondingly great. But for the first time it struck him that the price which he would have to pay for the prize would be heavier than he had counted on. It could not be that she was like the majority of women who made this show of respectability a sort of profession. He dared not hint that she was over-scrupulous. For the burden of speech was on her, and there were tears in her voice.

"You tell me solemnly you did not know this, or that if you knew it you had forgotten?" she insisted once more before she would draw nearer to him.



In other women the anxious speech would have irritated his nerves by its senseless repetition. But she looked so to advantage as she stood with her bosom heaving, her features lit up by her emotion, and her great eyes fixed entreatingly on him, that—where in other cases he might have answered with a meaningless imprecation—his voice shook a little as he responded, "Before Heaven and earth I tell you I never as much as thought of it. It is such a ridiculous rule to make, and I am an absent-minded man. All my friends give me that bad character. Nothing but marriage can cure me of the faults of a lifetime."

"*I believe you*, I could not look into your eyes and hear you talk like that and not believe you," she repeated as solemnly, sinking on a seat as if her trembling limbs refused to bear her any longer. Her instincts of revolt had been just, but they were over-ridden. Her belief in his absolute sincerity was restored, and she threw the letter into the grate, which was close by her side, tearing it into innumerable pieces, with a little joke at the idea that the anonymous writer could have hoped to destroy the bond between them.

She never again mentioned the matter to anyone, and it did not occur to her till afterwards to think it strange that Eva should have preserved so odd a silence when she found that the marriage was necessarily delayed, though her own return to England was interfered with in consequence.

More than once Mrs. Capern had blamed her for attaching any importance to the conduct of the other women in the hotel.

"Don't flare up at trifling things—use your common-sense," had been her constant advice to Zina. And yet she herself seemed inclined to get up an indignant bluster about a mere trifle, when she added inconsistently, "How ridiculous you are!"



As if you did not know how jealous other women can be, and how they would give worlds to be in your place!" Afterwards Zina remembered how she had added that they would be, "the sort of people to spring a lot of nonsense upon you like a rocket, just when you were comfortable!"

Zina's pride forced her to keep her own counsel and to try to put the matter out of her mind. But long afterwards she had a suspicion, with a pang which she could not hide, that the married woman who should have been her best protector knew more of the true bearing of what had happened than she ever revealed.

Her own shyness kept her silent, and a fit of shyness came over her when, one day before the marriage actually took place, George Layton tried again to allude to it—after all it was so uncomfortable.

"I am so ashamed of myself to have been so careless," he laughed a little nervously, "as so nearly to have made a mistake which would have seemed such a dreadful one in your eyes; although it would have been all the same, you know, in the eyes of most reasonable people."

She stared at him, a little frightened, missing the true import of his speech, and only seeing it afterwards. But the fright was only momentary, and when she thought of it, she flushed with a sort of shame as she recognised all the generous preparations he was making for her comfort, and how she had allowed herself, even for a minute or two, to doubt his good faith.

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BOOK II.







## CHAPTER I.

### AFTER THE MARRIAGE.

THE Laytons returned to England directly after their marriage. And the blank which follows the excitement of travelling through new scenes of artistic and intellectual delight was modified in Zina's case by the pleasure of settling down in her new home. Her husband would have proposed a week or two in London, but the season—which, when in its full swing, had that year been distinguished by unusual vitality—was flagging to its close. The invitations to balls, dinners, routs, races, concerts, and *matinées*, which had hitherto been showered on the tables of the elect, were now becoming beautifully less, and the novelty-craving, pleasure-loving public began as usual to find out that the season had been a failure, and abused the Syren which had charmed them with its infinite variety, and was now beginning to show a hag-like face.

The marriageable daughters who had still to remain unmarried; the dowagers who regretted the money



which had been spent on failure; the hosts who had to pay the bills for festive gatherings which had proved unprofitable, and the penniless detrimentals who had been taught to know their proper position, all united in chorus, and found out that the Season had been one of the worst ones ever known.

The bride and bridegroom arrived at that period of depression, when the flowers in the window-boxes in the best houses of Mayfair and Belgravia were left to droop unwatered, and the striped awnings over the balconies had already been taken down. The *parterres* in Hyde Park were no longer gay with many colours, but dusty and faded; the grass in Regent's Park was parched and exhausted, and Kensington Gardens were given over to a few pedestrians, groups of children and perambulators.

The marked diminution in smart barouches, glittering Victorias and Morvi carts, in the daily stream of wheeled traffic; and the dearth of riders in the Row announced the fact that the Season was drawing to its close, while everybody was complaining that the heat was stifling. Delicate complexions were unbecomingly flushed, and Zina—who had always had a dislike to smart parties though she had tolerated the smaller gatherings at her father's house, and who thought that the atmosphere of the theatres and Italian Opera House would be intolerable—was rejoiced when George Layton acceded to her request, taking her at once to the country house in Surrey, which had been in his family for more than two generations.

“You will find it dull enough unless you fill it with guests. I have seldom lived in it myself since the old people died, and a lonely bachelor can only amuse himself with grumpy male friends. But we will change all that now,” he said, scarcely heeding her answer when she hastened to declare that a society *à deux* would quite suffice for her.



Zina raved about her new home, with its old-fashioned grounds, its beautiful timber, and—that necessity in a landscape—a piece of ornamental water. Layton called it a “duck-pond,” but the duck-pond was large enough to have a small boat moored on it; there were sedges on its banks, and beautiful reflections in its depths.

The grey towers of the old stone house harmonised well with the trees which surrounded it, and if the grounds were not large the slight assistance of art gave them the appearance of communicating with vast stretches of greensward. Layton laughed at his wife when she told him that the place realised her day-dreams and fairy visions. She was in a humour to be pleased, and was equally delighted with the old staircase, the antique balusters, the immense hall, the big drawing-room with large looking-glasses, consoles, marble tables, candelabra, tapestry with cupids and flowers, and handsome paper which formed a background for family portraits.

“The portraits are not ours, and the tapestry is worm-eaten stuff—we are not people who can pride ourselves on our genealogical tree—the whole thing went together, when my grandfather made his fortune in oil, and purchased the place, pretty well half a century ago,” George said with a shrug, “but I never find it necessary to enter into particulars, the less one explains the better, when things are taken for granted.”

It was one of the speeches which jarred on Zina, though it was lightly said. And it jarred on her still more when, on hurrying to the conservatories, finding that they contained the blossoms she loved, and announcing her intention of still studying the luminous textures of the lily-petal, and the sheeny velvet of the rose, he answered indifferently, “I think you have real talent, but you will have some-



thing else to do now; you can buy what pictures you please."

The cynicism reminded her again of her father, who on her return from studying in Rome had told her that he had a particular objection to religious pictures, they were a survival of bygone superstitions. "Whatever else you paint," Stuart Newbolt had said, "may I beg that you will steer clear of Madonnas, and those anatomical monstrosities with wings, called angels."

George Layton was less sweeping in his restrictions. He could hardly be severe after having raved about Andrea del Sarto and his consummate harmony of manner, in line, colour, and *chiaro-oscuro*. Had it not been the picture of Andrea, the faultless, which first attracted him to his wife? But none the less did he probe her with his cynical stiletto.

Her energy and her small enthusiasms amused him, whilst the look of amusement in his face was perhaps harder to bear than any amount of open sarcasm. He told her smilingly that she was like a child. For as soon as her boxes were unpacked, and her dress arranged for the autumn (a point on which George was particular) she began to occupy herself with the furniture and the gardens. But the gardeners were sufficient for the work, which they had been accustomed to do for years, and looked a little askance at the new mistress who ventured to interfere with horticultural details.

She was fond of altering things, and experimenting in improvements, but nothing could be altered to advantage in the conservatories. All that she could wish in the way of Gloire de Dijon and Maréchal Niels, Japanese lilies, tuberous begonias, velvety gloxinias, and standard fuchsias—to be varied in the winter-time by camelias and chrysanthemums—were there in lavish abundance. She was intending to suggest the cultivation of the *Tropaeolum*, but



its wax-like bunches already hung from the roofs, with the newest specimens of clematis, and there were even orchid-houses. Yet it was vexatious to be obliged to ask the gardeners' leave before she could cut flowers for her dinner-table.

She would have turned her attention, next, to the great kitchen garden where the cauliflowers, the cabbages, the dainty-leaved asparagus, and the big carrots were all wonderful, on account of their luxuriant abundance; but there again the head-gardener had his prerogative. She had a yearning to be allowed to bring up a few seedlings for herself, but even that could not be allowed for fear of infringing on somebody's province.

It was worse when she tried to remodel the house. The housekeeper had always dreaded the advent of a lady with new-fangled ideas, who would despise her for the constant dustings and polishings which it had been her delight to superintend. The handsome rose-wood chairs and sofas in the large "droin-room" had been carefully covered up, and the hues of the old-fashioned carpet had been wonderfully preserved by Mrs. Newton's recipe of hiding it with brown holland. Even house-flies had not been allowed to desecrate the huge portraits, which—as George so cynically confessed—did not belong to his family, but had been purchased with the whole "plant."

And Zina decided at last to consign the ladies in mob-caps, ladies with large ruffles, and jovial reckless-looking squires, who smiled at her from the gilded frames which were innocent of a speck of dust, to the tender mercies of Mrs. Newton and the hand-maidens who were constantly employed in their rubbings and scrubblings.

It would have been positively cruel to have arrived at any other conclusion. And the new mistress was only anxious to propitiate the old lady,



who had taken her fancy at first, when she looked smiling and respectable as she stood curtsying to receive the bride, dressed in her stiffest black silk gown, and cap with lilac ribbons. There seemed to be no other method so good as that of leaving her in undisturbed possession of her own domains, and after a while Zina acknowledged that there was little or nothing for a new-comer to improve. For Mrs. Newton, who had been inclined to be not only worried, but a little patronising at seeing the chairs and tables wheeled into different positions, was generally triumphant when in the end they were wheeled back again into the time-honoured places they had occupied ever since George Layton could remember. And Zina had to content herself with the knowledge that she had furniture enough to play with in the department of which she remained Queen of all she surveyed.

For boudoir, bedroom and dressing-room had been specially ornamented for the bride's appearance by a collection of curiosities, which the housekeeper in her secret heart sneered at as "gimcracks," but which her master had been years in amassing from every quarter of the globe. George had been in the habit of bringing home something unique which had particularly struck his fancy, from each of his foreign journeys. The result, if *bizarre*, was certainly wonderful. For the articles which Mr. Layton had accumulated were of rare value. When he collected them he had had no idea of preparing for a wife; he had bought them for his own pleasure and warehoused them in an empty room. And the artistic house-decorator to whom he wrote from the Continent, telling him to dispose them to the best advantage in preparing a suite of apartments for a lady, had been a little puzzled how to arrange them.

"I'm most afeared to go into missus's room after



dark," one of the housemaids had acknowledged. And her master had laughed when he heard how she thought that them "things on the wall" (meaning some Japanese monsters) would "make a rush at her with their wings."

It had been sufficient that Zina was delighted with the result.



## CHAPTER II.

### A GILDED CAGE.

So it happened that for a time the large drawing-room was given over to desolation and the domestic irtual of Mrs. Newton. It would be most suitable, as George remarked, for a ball-room, or theatricals, in which case the furniture could be moved out of the way. Meanwhile they lived in the second drawing-room,—a sunny room on the west side of the house, which Zina had constantly filled with plants from the conservatories.

And as the autumn came on, the dripping beeches with their yellow leaves looked less dreary from this room.

"I like the view much better—you can not only see the shrubbery, but that bit of the 'wilderness' which I love," said the wife, gazing with affectionate eyes at a belt of intermingled trees where pines and coniferæ gave promise of vigorous growth. "We ought to be very happy here—it is a sort of earthly paradise," she added with an unconscious sigh.



"Happy here all our lives, with a sort of 'John Anderson my Jo,' happiness, going hand in hand together for the next fifty years, to sleep at last in the village churchyard! No, my dear, I should be dog-tired of that sort of happiness, and I fancy that you too would not find it a period of unalloyed bliss," answered George, laughing heartily.

But the tone of his voice grated on her, and for the first time she took herself to task for not being sufficiently thankful for her freedom from care, and her sudden promotion from anxious, hardworking poverty to an affluence which ought to have made any woman happy.

If George had only given her more of his society, instead of burying himself in his study!

At first she respected his hours of retirement. That stamp of intellect on his face must mean possibilities, some fibres of manly ambition which needed only to be humoured into growth. It was a little time before she understood that he had tried books as he had tried society, sports, baccarat, politics and travelling, and that all in turn had become flat, and would be flatter than ever if his experiment in married life palled upon him too.

He was a collector of books, retiring to his library for many hours in the day. But when she followed him into the sanctum she found that he did not study much. He was a genuine lover of the delicate vellum of the books, and he had several rare editions of which he was amazingly careful; the mere suspicion of grease on a page, or a dog's-ear, or a thumb mark, being a matter of abhorrence to him. If he seldom read his books, he collated them, and had them continually catalogued and rebound; he talked as if he had read all of them in the days of his youth. In this sanctum he smoked a good deal, once offering her a cigarette. He did so as a matter of habit, and then suddenly pulled himself



up, declaring that he had forgotten she was one of the women who occupied a superior platform, and had an objection to the fragrant weed. In the study, too, he had continual glasses of brandy or curaoa, remarking on the dulness of the country, the objectionable dampness of the English climate, and the necessity of taking something to keep out the cold.

When she knocked at the door, he pretended to be deeply engrossed with a book, or occupying himself with newspapers, but after a while she began to have her own suspicions that he spent a good deal of time in sleeping, as well as smoking, or drinking these glasses of curaoa. It was not complimentary to her society. She began to fancy that he had a look of discontent or disappointment on his face, but did not as yet suspect that he was missing something to which he had been always accustomed, and that the presence of one woman, although she might be the woman he had selected as his wife, could not altogether compensate for the absence of the numerous women who adored him, and the men who felt the attraction of his presence. A companionship *à deux* was not likely to be sufficient for him.

It needed no one to point out to her the mistake of trying to force sentimental situations. When he did not seem to be anxious for her company she left him, having not the slightest doubt of his real affection for her, and reminding herself that a man did not marry a portionless girl for nothing.

All the same it *was* dull. For, as he did not like her to spend too much time over her painting, there seemed to be nothing else for her to do. She had come to a pass in life when there was never likely to be anything really important for her to do. It was depressing. She was energetic enough and English enough not to feel as if marriage ought to



limit her capacities, or put an end to possibilities in the future. She could not hold to the doll's house theory of existence, or feel as if life had no more in store for her, because she had met the man who was destined to be her husband and married him. Rather was it in accordance with her theory, that the drama of existence should begin, and new vistas of usefulness open for her. She knew she had no reason for discontent if, after the few first weeks of wedded companionship, her husband did not necessarily remain a lover, for she prided herself on being a reasonable woman, freer from the temptation of making illogical demands on the time and patience of others than most of her sex. Still in some strange and undefined way she missed the mystery of the unknown, the delight of indefinite hopes, and in the every-day routine of this countrified domestic life she was conscious of disillusion. The charm of autumn with its varying tints was as beautiful in its way as the charm of the spring, but there was something melancholy, as time went on, in the rainy days and the decaying vegetation.

The rain penetrated the warmest clothing, and as there was not much pleasure in walking over lawns or gravel paths, with tiny waterfalls streaming from one's umbrella, she was driven back into the cosy nest which her husband had prepared for her. It was cosy enough, and very beautiful; much money had been spent in lining it with down, but it struck her more than once, with a pang at her heart which seemed ungrateful and which she could not exactly comprehend, that George would have been better pleased if she could have occupied herself altogether with *bibelôts* in the pretty little suite of apartments which he prepared for her, and which was up to the newest lights.

"Oh, how lovely," she had said when she had seen it first. The art treasures *were* lovely enough,



but she could not look at them for ever. That he should expect her to be happy shut up alone in these rooms and deprived of any special employment gave her the impression that he wanted her to be a superior sort of canary bird, confined in a gilded cage, fed with seed and lumps of sugar, and only allowed to hop about at certain times in the day.

To ramble out even when the weather was bad seemed to her preferable to spending hours in the gilded cage.

But one morning, when her husband met her equipped in waterproof and with campstool his look of surprise was so great, that she had to say in explanation, "Don't you see how beautiful the mist is? I thought of going out to sketch it."

"I see that it will bring on lumbago or sciatica," he said shrugging his shoulders. "How can you like to be so constantly damp?"

Damping to *him*, he seemed to hint, but she was too disconcerted to laugh at the joke.



## CHAPTER III.

### TIME FOR REFLECTION.

IN her boudoir she had ample time for reflection. And if the reaction which her husband had perhaps been anxious to bring about did not come all at once, if she did not as yet weary of this solitary country life, though he had more than once railed at its excessive dulness, it was because her energetic mind was putting out fresh feelers after increased occupation. Town pleasures, as she still declared, had very little seduction for her, and even George did not advocate a move in the autumn months.

"Nobody," as he said, "would be in London at this season of the year," the toiling millions who might some day take their revenge on the pampered minority, being still at work in the hive, but ignored as if they did not exist.

"The spring," as she answered cheerily, "would be the time to enjoy the country," and as he did not think it necessary to go in for hostile remarks, he did not answer that the spring was the very



time for going to Town. She began to talk about the lambs and the calves, the warbling of the birds, and the coming of primroses, and she noticed that he did not respond. He did not think it necessary to tell her that there was nothing interesting in lamb unless it were on a dish, that he never thought of noticing the gambols of calves, and that the warblings of thrushes and blackbirds to their mates were apt to disturb his slumbers in the morning.

He did not even care to talk about his travels.

"I do believe he has seen everything," she said to herself, "from crocodiles to the great sea-serpent itself. You can startle him with nothing."

Even his smile was a trifle *blasé* when she tried to discuss these things with him. And he had a habit of shutting his eyes as if they were quite worn out with all the pictures of cities and landscapes imprinted on the retina.

In reality he was only waiting to propose a "house-party," having no intention of continuing to live up to the sort of strain which had been forced upon him when it was necessary to secure the woman he loved. The rebound from intense anxiety before he had succeeded in his attempt was followed by a flatness which she would be certain to recognise sooner or later. It would only be a matter of time; he waited for her to find it out, and to develop into the fashionable woman who would seek the ordinary modes of enlivening herself. The staff of servants was more than ample. There was one maid to help her to arrange her various dresses, and another to take continual messages to the stately housekeeper. She had little to do but to give the servants *carte blanche* to study the tastes of their master. He was fastidious, and was accustomed to be humoured in his eating and drinking.

After the first month or two this state of things



began to weigh upon her conscience. She remembered the poverty which she herself had endured, and the unevenness which had always struck her in earthly lots. She could not help reminding herself how she had determined, if the time ever came when she would not have to earn her own living, never again to give way to idleness, never to be without some great resource, in fact to act much in the same way as if she were still dependent on her own efforts for support. She had not thought it necessary to tell her husband of the *rôle* which she had marked out for herself, but his remarks about her painting had been a keen disappointment to her. That desire of the artist to collaborate with Nature, being not merely imitative or mimetic, but infusing her own spirit into everything which she painted, had seemed to him a little absurd. Work! He had never worked himself and had no sympathy with work; he wished his wife to be ornamental like other successful women.

He had humoured her, during their short engagement, in a way of speaking about the subject which seemed to him slightly ridiculous, trembling on the verge of the theatrical, but as a husband he no longer considered it necessary to humour her.

"I like—to act—as if I were independent," she had tried to explain to him more than once, "I cannot imagine myself in a situation in which it would not be right to be industrious—the people who set themselves to do something are always the happiest."

Something in his voice grated on her as he answered:

"What is the good of doing anything in particular, when in fifty years whatever we do will be sure to be forgotten. There are too many gifted people in the present generation for the gifts of any one person to be of any importance whatever."



He spoke, as he explained, quite as much of himself as of her, and she began to understand that this was the secret of his constant inertia. After all it was not uncomplimentary when he further explained that he could not bear to see her wearing herself out in spoiling her pretty eyes and delicate complexion with unnecessary fag. She was forced to remember that it was he who had made the fag "unnecessary". An out-of-door life was after all very much to her taste, and when the weather became finer with the air cold and clear, there were the resources of riding and driving, and George Layton had no further excuse for shutting himself up in the house. George was a good rider. Apparently there was nothing of this sort, which he did badly, but he cared for it no more than he cared for shooting for its own sake; she noticed that he took little interest in his horses or his dogs. He explained that he thought the riding slow; what was the use of ambling along in dirty lanes which he had seen a thousand times before? He wished his wife to ride well, he even took pains with her riding and taught her how to take her fences; remarking that he did not see what was the use of her sitting straight and riding really well unless she had someone to see her ride.

"I want you to look well in the Row," he added, and she could not help thinking that he cared most for riding in the Row, or hunting with a party of friends. To run the risk of being splashed up to one's neck with no object in view but that of amusing oneself with one's own wife evidently did not suit him.

He confessed to the fact of caring most for yachting, but this again was not enlivening; since it proved on enquiry that though it might have been possible for him to keep his own yacht as a bachelor, it was one of the expenses which he would have to curtail as a married man.



He took refuge once more in his sanctum after they had scoured the lanes and moors together. And she comforted herself by thinking that—as he did not care for riding, and was not fond of getting about on his own legs—she could eke out the short days by visits to the cottagers in the neighbourhood.

It was not the first time in her life that she had found herself taking an interest in the opinions, passions, and aspirations of that large class of her fellow-creatures called the “working class,” and she was delighted when it suddenly occurred to her that the position of a Lady Bountiful still remained for her and would be exactly the right one for her to fill. There were plenty of people for her to help immediately around her own grounds, and she was astonished beyond measure when she found that George was worried by what he called her “interference.” He put it to her gently but not the less was she surprised, when he begged her to leave things alone, and not to create an awkwardness for his steward.

“It is quite a mistake to suppose that you will make things any better for Hodge and his wife by sympathising with them and petting them,” he said, scarcely able to hide an anxiety which seemed to her queer and disproportionate. She could only conclude that any parade of philanthropy was distasteful to him.

“Charity,” he declared, in language more stilted than he was accustomed to use “is the only crime which disguises itself under the aspect of a virtue.” But Zina had not been injudicious in her charity, and did not like him to hug that fallacy to his soul. She winced at his words, though he flattered her as usual, and declared that nature had intended her to bloom in an atmosphere of beauty, and that everything which was unpleasant should be kept out of her sight.



"O I don't understand you, or agree with you at all," she remonstrated in her turn. "What is the use of selfishly refusing to see anything that is uncomfortable?"

Was it possible, she asked herself, that living as it were in one plane of existence he was shut out from appreciating the feelings and ideas which went on in the being of others in a somewhat lower state? She was ready to make any excuse for his fastidiousness, but was determined on this occasion to be brave. He declared that the majority of the cottagers were impostors trading on her kindness, and she angered him by arguing that it was the rich man and not the beggar who was the refuse of society. Her mind had too much time to feed on perplexing social problems, and she began to hate the personal luxuries obtained at the cost of suffering to the animal creation, and to inveigh against a system based on coercion and violence to one's fellows.

"My mother was a flower-girl; she belonged to that 'separate nation' which forms the base of the social pyramid; I want to know more about that nation—the rulers of the future," she vexed him by explaining with that freedom and frankness which had at first attracted him, but which now seemed to him out of keeping with her position as his wife.

She insisted on having her own way, carrying soup and puddings to the villagers, and even sitting up at night with a woman who had been ill, but his opposition was extreme, and almost violent.

It was the nearest approach to a quarrel which had taken place yet.

"You educated women are fools, too ready to spoil things by a kindliness which is pleasant to yourselves—you call it by fine names—altruism and all the rest of it—but there is something selfish in your determination to be popular with





"THERE'S A CURSE HANGING OVER THE PLACE!"—*See Chapter XII.*







the people—you are hardly to blame for a mistake which is common to the sex, and I suppose you will end by doing like most of the others, pleasing yourself," he said in the heat of an argument which seemed to her more exaggerated on his side than hers.

"It does not matter whether you call it altruism or selfishness—fine names have nothing to do with it—it pleases me certainly and I like to do it," she answered with a laugh, priding herself on keeping her temper.

Not the less had the iron entered into her soul when she found that all the appeals which she had made to his nobler nature had proved utterly ineffective, and that he had repelled them without remorse and without betraying the slightest sensitiveness to such appeals.

"Is he afraid of my talking to the people; what harm can that do?" she found herself asking in this strange experience of their mutual unfittedness, but she was not inclined to give way. "Of course, there must be new beginnings to everything—one must accommodate oneself to new conditions," she argued with herself in this beginning of her married life, when first of all it dawned upon her that she and her husband were radically different.



## CHAPTER IV.

### COUNTRY LIFE.

So the days passed on till curled and brittle leaves were accumulating in the hollows of the hills, and one morning a network of frost was glittering on the bare branches of the trees, making them look like aisles of a Gothic cathedral.

Zina gazed admiringly at the woods in their "white silence," and she had no longer anything to say in protest when George rubbed his hands together, as they sat down after breakfast by the fire which had been lit in the smaller drawing-room, remarking, "I think we shall have an early winter, the frost was severe last night. The right thing is to have a few people at once to cheer us up. By-and-by, when you get used to it, I shall insist on a proper house-party—fill the place with people—and then, when I have drawn out a list, it will be *your* part to set to work to issue the invitations—just at present—as it is early times—we will be content with a few."



It destroyed her fond idea that during the first few months of married life her sole companionship might suffice for him, and that in the happy interchange of thought they might be all in all to each other. But she rebuked herself for foolish sentimentality. She was not sentimental enough to suppose that love must be the all-absorbing, all-engrossing passion of a man's life. On the contrary, she knew that English country life must involve country visiting and had looked forward to the summer when the house might be filled with cultured, refined and pleasant-mannered folks who would take their part in English amusements—lawn-tennis and golf.

But unfortunately the "few people," whom George invited, emphasized the differences which she had begun to discover between herself and him, being mostly male friends who had been the *habitués* of the bachelor's house. The excuse for inviting men had been on account of the sporting season.

But it turned out that very few of them really cared for hunting, any more than they probably cared for shooting.

There was generally some occasion for giving up adventurous sport, either the settled damp, or the hurricanes of wind, or the condition of the horses, and after a certain amount of ostentatious talk the host and his guests would adjourn to the billiard-room. There was a good deal of joking, but the jokes were not to Zina's taste. For of what is called the shadier side of life she had seen and known nothing during her previous experience; her father had shielded her from anything disagreeable and she had put it from her as too disgusting to think of. Her extreme simplicity, and her limited idea of the wickedness of the world, had sometimes almost roused her husband's laughter, and the laughter was all the louder, as she was not a religious woman, and admitted that the moral principles on which she



prided herself were only registered generalisations from experience.

To escape from some of the visitors whose manners she did not like, she spent much of her time in long rambling walks. Her husband had complained that the November days were dreary, and that before Christmas-time it would be necessary to invite many more guests. But the month of November, when the heavy dews lay on lawn, shrubbery, and woodland, when she could watch the ways of the birds, no longer concealed by the foliage, and hear the thrush beneath her window practising *roulades* for the coming spring, did not seem to her dull. She rejoiced in the cold fresh air, in the delicate veil of gold which still lingered on the elms, or in the oaks in the hollows which yet retained their russet leaves. She would come home sometimes in triumph with her hands laden with berries or even the latest of wild flowers. And by degrees she grew accustomed to spending more of her time in the cottage homes of her husband's tenants. For her ideas remained unaltered, she was unable to shake them off; they even gathered force, being unaffected by the world's verdict, the approval and condemnation of others having no irresistible power for her. Had it been merely a question of wishing to live in retirement, or a selfish turning away from any society but that which was of the highest or most intellectual, she would have acknowledged the truth of Layton's strictures when finding that his significant looks were wasted on her, he said:

"You must cultivate your powers to please and charm. I shall appreciate them all the more when they are not kept for myself—I want my friends to see what a delightful woman I have married." It was awkward for her to explain that his friends were distasteful to her. But he knew it without



explanation by the look of disapproval and surprise which he hated to see in her expressive face. He could not accuse her of saying much, but that strange secondary consciousness—telling her that all was not as it should be between herself and him—which she tried to keep in the background betrayed itself occasionally in her manner.

She had read somewhere that a wise wife never asked questions, and hitherto she had refrained from asking them. But matters came to a crisis when she was asked to entertain some women of whose style she did not approve. She determined to appeal to Layton about one of them.

"It is not merely that she is a *divorcée*—it is said that the world is sometimes cruelly hard on divorced women and I should not like to join in the hardness—but there is a fast tone about her which I don't like—she flirts so terribly, and there are all sorts of gossip afloat," she remonstrated with a directness which took him by surprise.

"My dear, you **have** no more in common with pulseless prudishness than I have myself. Don't go in for prudent propriety," he answered, as if he hoped to amuse her by his alliteration, "but you have a good many fond illusions, and I am afraid you will find some of these illusions rather difficult to keep up. You must take the world as you find it; I expect you to make things pleasant and not to sit in judgment on your neighbours."

"But supposing the gossip should happen to be true?"

"Surely you can guess what you like, and keep your inferences to yourself—you are generally so quick at comprehending," he said impatiently, and then he dropped the subject.

A pliant wife, as she thought to herself with a strange contraction at her heart, would have made things happier for him, but how was she to gloss



over the discrepancy between her ideas and his?

She shrank from the idea of thus "making things pleasant," but still more from the shock of his non-comprehension. For she was an idealist, and when she tried to explain and found that he did not understand her, she took herself to task. Did he think that she should have kept these feelings veiled? Was his mind too delicate to permit himself to admire a woman whose excessive frankness prompted her to speak out? Was the fault on *her* side, and was it possible that *his* ideal woman was a being who had a whole region of thoughts and feelings hidden away and not open to discussion? For though she had begun to have a suspicion of unfitness, the dread had not as yet occurred to her of their not having an inch of common ground between them.

She had to give way, but she did so with an unwonted air of despondency, which made her unusually silent in company. After a little while, her depression began to weigh upon her husband; he missed her usual buoyancy, her brightness in conversation, and felt it to be necessary to remonstrate with her about it.

He sought her for this purpose in her dressing-room before dinner. She was brushing out her hair, and he stood for a moment arrested by the beauty of the picture. The wintry days were very chilly, and the leaping flames from the little fireplace set round with china tiles were bringing out the lights and shadows in her face, shining on the scintillating diamonds on her hands, and on the blue-black masses of the *chevelure* on which she justly prided herself. A curiously grotesque piece of Japanese embroidery in black and gold which she used for a *portière*, made a suitable background for the picture. It was altogether a delightful bit of *chiaro-oscuro*, and he was keenly susceptible to the influence of such sights.



He had come to tell his wife how he resented her present mood, and to laugh her out of her belief in the desperate wickedness of the upper stratum of society, but as he sat down by her side with a lighted vesta and a cigar in his hand, he felt unable to bear the gaze of those limpid eyes, and far more inclined to relapse into his old manner of tender endearment.

"You look like an advertisement for Mrs. Allen's hairwash," he said, touching the hair admiringly; "No, it is a charming bit of *genre*—so homelike and natural; I wish you oftener looked like it. I wish," he added after a pause, "you were more restful, more like other women, and not always in an unsettled state, speculating on things beyond your power, and then you would be perfect in every respect, ready to put in a frame."

She did not answer. He seemed so utterly unaware of the sort of taunt conveyed in his speech. The moment was unfavourable for explanation. How could she tell him that much which would have made life worth living for the majority of women had no interest for her; that embroidery seemed to her a waste of time, and attending to household duties merely trivial in a case like her own, where there was so little to do?

"May I light my cigar?" he asked, as she continued silent, and even then she did not think it necessary to tell him that his habit of smoking at all times and seasons, before dinner as well as after it, was a bad habit, and one which was likely to injure his health sooner or later. For her husband seemed to have an iron constitution, and never could talk so easily as when under the influence of nicotine. As he smoked he began to enlarge on the differences between them, his objection to her spoiling the cottagers and letting them gossip to her during their visits, and his desire that she should



accommodate herself to the idiosyncracies of his various guests. He tried to speak coaxingly.

"We English people look at these things in a different light from the French, and you women are properly prudish," he said, as he smoked; "but really it is time you should give up a few of these insular prejudices."

She twisted her hair up with such energy that she tore it—it was a sign of her nervous impatience. Was it right, she asked herself, to talk so lightly of the barriers between right and wrong? She felt humbled, degraded that he should speak to her in such a way.

Did he wish her, she wondered vaguely, to be like the women whose complexions could not be approached too nearly without fear of soiling one's lips, and whose reputations equally resembled porcelain? She asked him the question in her excitement, and was astonished to find that he attempted to rebuke her for what seemed to him the vehemence and narrowness of a child.

"Really, my dear, the world does not need you to set it right—'this is proper and that is not'—stupid artificial demarcations—it will be neither better nor worse for all your meddling. Leave Mrs. Grundy to indulge in that sort of hurdy-gurdy grinding. I loathe it."

Something seemed to be falling like a drop of water down her back when he added,

"You make yourself ridiculous and I do not want my friends to laugh at you—it is ridicule which kills."

She did not need his explanatory comment that without forcing herself to say what was absolutely untrue, it would be easy for her to cultivate the manner of most society women, the manner, he went on to explain though he was visibly a little embarrassed, of gliding over tender places and making



oneself agreeable without sense of friction. Again it struck her that though she had never prided herself on any remarkable goodness, he was evidently impatient with the stupidity of good women, and that his enthusiasm was not for goodness which he treated as if it were an attribute of the lower middle-class.

"You must not get into the way of taking your ideas from Mrs. Carruthers who writes for shop-girls," he said a little sneeringly.

"Right principles are not to be mocked at," she answered as she looked at him with flashing eyes.

And then she broke off in her speech. For, with a short "Oh, don't let us talk nonsense!" and a hurried glance at the Louis Quinze clock, he got up and left her.



## CHAPTER V.

### BREAKING TO HARNESS.

IT was Layton's way of breaking her to harness ; he was ready to take a good deal of trouble to this desirable end ; he did not see why he should be displeased ; in fact he was in good spirits, hoping that his difficulties would disappear by degrees. For he had not been able to hide from himself for some time past the fact that difficulties existed. Had he not been too much in love to allow himself to weigh the matter seriously, he might have had doubts from the beginning as to whether this woman would make him the suitable, yielding wife with whom alone he could be happy. He now saw that when the hindrances to attainment had been greater than he had expected he had flung prudence to the winds, after the manner of a man who was not accustomed to be thwarted when he set his mind on anything. But he was not to be disconcerted. He comforted himself with the thought that already he had inserted the thin edge of the wedge, and



by degrees he hoped to wean Zina from some of her queer ways of thinking.

"Half a loaf," as he reminded himself, "was better than no bread", when a whole loaf could not be secured, and though he listened to some of his wife's sentiments with very mixed feelings, he had confidence in his own power, and hoped to win her in time to become the submissive, amiable woman with whom he could glide easily through existence.

It was inconsistent; he was aware of the inconsistency. It was the down-rightedness of this woman which had fascinated him at first, and her high modes of thought, and now—having transplanted her to another soil—he was doing his best to assimilate her to an easily recognised type. But George Layton had never prided himself on his consistency. He misinterpreted Emerson's saying—that the many-sided man has nothing to do with consistency.

On her part, she **was** ready to take herself to task. How was it that she had never noticed the serious discrepancies between his thoughts and her own? She remembered that she had made trifling confidences during their short engagement, but that the confidences had been all on one side; he had said little or nothing about his own former life. She had noticed, too, that when she led the conversation into graver topics he had steered gently away from them, and began again to talk about concerts or theatres. How was she to make him understand that though her ideas on religion were all unsettled, she was yet not without her higher aspirations?

His good spirits quickly flagged, and after this, whenever they were again in *tête-à-tête*, it was his turn to be languid. It was difficult to suppose that he had any cause for anxiety, and yet the lines had deepened on his brows, and a look of satiety, which she had shrunk from once before, haunted her again like a ghastly unreality as it reappeared on his face.



"Do you know you are not at all amusing to-night?" he said suddenly to her one evening, when between the coming and going of visitors there were fewer people than usual in the house.

Was it another ghastly fancy which brought back to her the memory of Louis XV. and Madame de Pompadour, who had always to amuse him? The Sèvres china, the wrought-iron work, and the other *chiffons* in her beautiful drawing-room palled on her in connection with that fancy. The coldness which had come between them, and the sudden change in their mutual positions were very enigmatical to her; but, then, there was something curious in her husband's smile, even when he spoke to her with a tenderness that was now unwonted in his voice, which was enigmatical altogether. It produced a sensation which she could hardly explain to herself. Could it be possible that he was selfish, as someone had told her, with a selfishness which was impregnable, and wilfully blind to the rights of others?

If it were so, it could not be necessary for her to let him know that she was acquainted with this cardinal defect in his sex; neither did she think it worth while to make too much of this question, but answered it lightly, saying that she could not pretend to talk in epigrams, or to drop a joke into every sentence, as in the brilliant dialogue of some of our modern plays.

Nevertheless she did her best to amuse him, while she was aware that she was entrenching herself in one of the worst forms of reserve, her deepest feelings being hidden away, and religiously preserved from the vulgarity of speech. It was possible, as she argued with herself, that this reserve might be the only means of preserving perfect peace between a man and a woman who looked at certain questions from different standpoints, and whose duty it



was mutually to give in to one another. There were things which her husband ought to have understood without forcing her to speak of them, and she had discovered by this time that even if she could oblige herself to speak of them, he would assume the superior position of the man and treat them as of no importance. Not the less was she bitterly disappointed, and there were days when the throbbing of the excited heart, and the horror of the something invisible and intangible, which was interposing between them, was almost more than she could bear. She was glad of any trivial subject which did not need to be tabooed. There seemed to be no reason to be silent about them to Layton. Yet he was a man who so evidently liked things to be comfortable and pleasant all round that she was vexed with herself for not hiding the truth from him when one day, having ventured a little further than usual, in one of her lonely rambles, she had stones thrown at her, evidently aimed from one of the cottages.

"One would think that there was something in my appearance to inspire feelings of hatred," she said, shewing her delicate wrist which had been slightly grazed by one of these missiles. "If I could only have explained that I intended them nothing but good; but an old woman who cursed me shut the door in my face."

"Did I not tell you I had good reasons for wishing you not to interfere with these savages?"

"One would think there was some mystery. — What is there to hide?" she asked with mixed feelings. "Surely anything would be better than surreptitious doings on my part, and seeing that I think it better to visit some of our poor people—would you not have me tell you honestly of my intentions?"

But he only answered her, "no good ever comes



from meddling with these people, and trying to annihilate class distinctions," speaking more sternly than he had ever spoken to her as yet; whilst she—overwhelmed by the shock of her recent discovery—occupied herself with winding a handkerchief round her injured wrist, and declaring that nothing in the world was the matter with it, and that in fact her feelings were a good deal more hurt at finding that her attempts to help people met with so rough a response.

"All the more reason for persevering. I was never conquered by anything of that sort," she added in a cheery voice. "If the people are as bad as that, they must be very wretched—and I cannot bear to think of anyone being unhappy," whilst Layton muttered something to himself about its being hard that the even tenour of a man's life should be interrupted by such childishness. He did not speak his thoughts aloud; he thought it more diplomatic to render his wife's duties as *châtelaine*, more onerous than before by inviting other friends. This time there was no intermission; she seemed to have brought it on herself. There was first one circle of guests in the varied house-party, then another and another, and by degrees it became second nature for Mrs. Layton to perform the part of hostess, always graciously if sometimes a little languidly, in what was for her a new treadmill of life.

Amongst those who had promised to visit them during the winter, coming soon after Christmas, and remaining till the spring, was Eva Capern, and Eva prided herself on her capability for keeping other people amused.

Mrs. Capern of course had not stood still; she had developed a good deal according to that law of nature which involves either deterioration or improvement. It was almost impossible to think of her now as the delicate and fragile woman with



large rounded eyes who had never struck a jarring note at Stuart Newbolt's entertainments.

She had then been always dressed in the height of the fashion, just as she prided herself on being the "smartest" woman present now. But *then* she had spoken in hushed tones, retailing the scraps of information which she had picked up in her reading from newspapers and reviews and had managed to satisfy her guardian's fastidious taste, though she had enjoyed life in a different fashion from that in which she enjoyed it at present.

She was not only rather weary of playing at invalidism, but circumstances had happened which made it necessary for her to secure a *pied à terre* in the house of another woman who—though not a blood-relation—was the nearest connection she had in the world. Her husband—who had indulged her in every caprice, and had quietly acquiesced to being left in solitude whilst his wife went about to various places enjoying herself—had amused himself during her absence by indulging in ruinous speculations.

His losses of money obliged Eva to exert herself, and she determined to do her best to "keep in" with the Laytons.

The two women had always jarred on each other, and they would continue to do so wherever they met. The selfish, common-place, pleasure-seeking, manœuvring nature would always clash with the other which knew nothing of low motives, or petty self-seeking, and which would at any time be ready to wreck its own happiness for the sake of doing right. But Mrs. Capern knew that however Zina might wince at her ill-timed observations, she would never refuse an asylum to her. It might be different with the husband—a man easy to offend: and therefore Eva determined in the playing of her cards to be always on the alert to propitiate Mr. Layton, and if need be to fight his battles. Her way of



trying to "keep in" with both had occasionally the effect of making Zina wince. She no longer spoke in the languid tones which had been a part of her invalidism, but in an unnecessarily loud voice, indulging in bursts of laughter and sallies of merriment often at the expense of her hostess.

"There was a good deal to laugh at," Zina willingly admitted, though she wished that Mrs. Capern would not make quite so much of her intimate friendship with herself, or give her opinion so decidedly about her domestic affairs.

"Fancy sitting in a garden-chair and surveying the view. A nice way of amusing oneself," jeered Eva "a life fit for a cow; that seems to be about what you were reduced to before we came to cheer you up."

"I thought Mr. Layton was always so fond of country life; at least I always understood so before we were married," answered Zina, somewhat coldly.

"Country life is a very different thing to country-house life, my dear," corrected Mrs. Capern, "and his bachelor house-parties used to be varied by London—why he never missed a season in London. He has always been accustomed to be the centrepiece of an admiring circle of people, and you can't expect sterling silver for a centrepiece. You'll learn like most of us to be content with the best electro-plate."

There was not only reproach in the clear eyes with which Zina looked at the woman who had been brought up in such intimate companionship with herself that she could venture to say things which no one else would have dared to say, but a sudden light came into them as if some recollection had been roused in her mind.

"If you knew all this"—she began, and then checked herself as if in loyalty the subject could not be discussed.



Eva was a little startled, a little remorseful, and yet touched almost humourously by the unspeakable things in Zina's face.

"As if I ever intended her to put such ridiculous faith in every word I told her!" she said in an aside to herself, and then rattled on to hide any possible uncomfortableness, "I don't see why you should insist on putting that unfortunate husband of yours on a pedestal against his will. He would be the last man to wish it. Most husbands and wives *do* step off their pedestals directly they are married—you see it would be such a bore to keep that sort of thing up," and she gave a short laugh—"my dear, I am afraid I am quite hardened, I have no pity for people who make troubles about their lives which don't exist."

"You may be certain *I* make none, and that if I did I would come to no one about it," answered Zina with all her old pride.

And again Mrs. Capern almost regretted her interference when she saw that flash in the eyes and that contraction of the lips.



## CHAPTER VI.

### ZINA EXERTS HERSELF.

ZINA did not need Mrs. Capern's interference to tell her that if she had to get into a new groove, the sooner she adapted herself to it the better. "I wouldn't funk it if I were you," Eva would have added in the slangy talk which she could affect when it suited her purpose and with her loudest laugh, if the slightest encouragement had been given her.

Meanwhile though it would have been well if the subject could have been tabooed between them, yet there were still covert hints which possibly had the effect of leading the hostess to exert herself.

Whenever she saw that a lack of animation was vexatious to her husband she made an effort to laugh and talk. She taxed her ingenuity to amuse the old as well as the young. Had it been summertime she could have managed to extract diversion for her guests from all sorts of *al fresco* entertainments; but as the weather still remained churlish and capri-



cious she exerted all her forethought and talent for organisation in devising different fashions of indoor amusement. Dancing in the evenings, cards, and *tableaux vivants* were amongst the new forms of recreation suggested by Eva. An atmosphere of the man-milliner and the *friseur* seemed to pervade the house. The staircases and landings were littered with endless handboxes and parcels. And Zina, who was half dazed by the new calls which were made upon her energy, tried to enter upon the changed state of things with a return of those bright spirits which might help her temporarily to forget any fancied inconveniences. She herself superintended the decoration of the big drawing-room, now utilised as a ball-room, with palms and ferns from the conservatories as well as suitable flowers, and stifled her objection to the two or three men whose incomes required a little padding, and who were evidently not averse to winning money at cards. And the suggestion of *tableaux* really pleased her. It woke the artist in her; she was soon in her element in planning scenes from history and heaping up all the old brocades, satins, and laces to be found in the old wardrobes.

A stage was erected in the ball-room, where she superintended the arrangements of the *tableaux* which her admirers declared to be "not copied, you know, but pictures original with herself." The *tableaux* were a success, and a murmur of admiration greeted each fresh creation, overwhelming the spectators with Mrs. Layton's wealth of resource and knowledge of artistic costume. But the hostess had scarcely a breathing space. Not only was there no more time for visiting her husband's tenants, but no more time for exchanging observations with George Layton himself. It did not occur to her to suspect that she was carrying out a programme which had been arranged for a purpose; but as she was not a



good hand at trying to seem happy on the surface, her jests were sometimes forced, and her manner almost reckless.

"It would be all very well if human life were a ballet set to frivolous music, or if I could choose the friends I like," she acknowledged to Eva.

"My dear, you would not have it a fight. Each struggles for his own, and slays his fellows in this world of ours; you must choose one or the other—choose the ballet," answered that lady with a burst of silvery laughter.

"It may seem all right to you," Zina answered a little slowly, "but you know our opinions differ."

And when pressed for an explanation she felt half remorseful at having to hint that she did not like Mrs. Meredith, in the absence of her husband, to be looking such unutterable things at Mr. Dalton. It might be all very well in her character of Lucy in that *tableau* of Ravenswood, but why should she continue to look them after the *tableau* was over?

"What else would you have her look?" cried Eva with a burst of laughter. "Half the married women in the world would be glad of paying off a score on their absent husbands—if they could comfort themselves that the husbands cared a rap."

And then Zina wondered if Mrs. Capern had been consulting with George (for the two had become greater friends than they ever were on the Continent) when Eva added beneath her breath: "I would keep those objections to myself if I were you. You must have learnt to talk in that way from living with Mary Carruthers. It is all very well for *her* and for the people she mixes with—but, to tell you the truth, it sounds fearfully—middleclass."

"That is a new fling which has not much meaning, unless it means that there is a break-water—very useful in this country," said Zina, holding her own as she had held it in past times against Mrs. Capern.



It was scarcely worth while to ask Eva what she meant, still less to take her seriously and to remind her of the eternal difference between what is lovely and what is not. Zina's smile was enigmatical, for what would have been the use of discussing Mary Carruthers with a woman like Mrs. Capern or defending herself for her own fastidiousness of character?

She only said to herself, "There will always be different sorts of society, but certainly my father—who brought Eva up—would not have agreed with her in caring for the sort which pleases her."

After this there was no more use in protesting against any arrangement; it only involved a loss of time.

"Well—I had marked a few names which I thought we could leave out," she had ventured once before to say to George, who did not apparently see the marks in the list of people to be invited. But now she never ventured on an opinion. "Where are your notions of hospitality? Consider it settled," he would say if she attempted a protest.

After all Eva's philosophy might be true—that the majority of husbands appeared to adapt themselves to the tastes of the women they were courting *before* marriage, and afterwards came the wife's turn; *she* had to adapt herself.

Mrs. Capern said all this in a general sort of way, arching her pretty brows sarcastically.

"And the sooner one adapts oneself to the changes in society the better. For we are changing nearly everything," explained the voluble woman, who could chatter more glibly about the freaks of Dame Society than about the works of art at Florence or Venice—"few married women are such prudes as they used to be."

"Are they not? If you mean that most wise women are sceptical about nine-tenths of the scandals



they hear of in what you call society, I should say so much the better."

"And as to yourself, foolish girl, you ought to be more than content; your husband is never jealous of you, of your popularity, or of the men who admire you." To herself Eva added, "I believe she thinks she is really exposing herself to contamination in his set." And then aloud, "My dear, it is preposterous that a woman should pretend to mix in society and have such ideas as you have. I am an old and staunch friend," she added with silvery laughter, "and I can give you some good advice. If women are the conquerors of the conquerors of the soil they ought to know how to keep a man's heart when they have conquered it. Humour a man in all his tastes. Give him a good dinner, a little sauce in the way of flattery; let him choose his own society just as he likes, and that is the high road to managing him completely."

"If women are the conquerors of the conquerors of the soil they ought to exercise their power for the best," Zina said, a little conscious of appearing to disadvantage, as she felt the impossibility of entering into details about her private affairs with her father's ward. To tell Eva or any other woman of her own opinion that when the high ideals were lost, marriage relapsed into a mere commercial treaty, or to lift the veil from the sanctity of home would have seemed to her an offence which nothing could condone.

"It is perfection to which we must aspire, though we cannot hope to reach the ideal," she still said to herself, outraged more than she cared to shew, when Eva—who had installed herself in the house, with the knowledge that Mr. Capern was comfortably out of the way—taking advantage of the position of patronage in which she had formerly been placed, answered with a laugh which irritated her, "Is it



possible you do not really know that men are all the better for sowing their wild oats?"

For though Mrs. Capern seldom attempted to realise the feelings and thoughts of others, she loved a dainty bit of scandal if that scandal did not become tragic. Her curiosity knew no bounds now that she no longer suffered from delicate health, and her sharp wits had already ferreted out the fact of the something mysterious and uncomfortable which necessitated the presence of so many guests in the house. To her chums she was far more plain-spoken than she ventured to be with Zina. "Why the wife's an innocent," she wrote to one of her gossips. "He keeps her here and pretends to give way to her objection to living in London, and surrounds her with a set of people who play into his hands, whilst all the time she is afraid about him and tries to keep up the pretty little fiction that he is a piece of perfection, and we laugh in our sleeves because the man's character is well known, and if she were not a perfect innocent she would not spend a day in London society without knowing the sort of character he bears. You may tell me that perhaps I ought to have inquired into all this when we met him on the Continent, but first of all I was too delicate in health and Zina was quite old enough to understand her own affairs, and next he is perfectly charming to me and as estimable morally as lots of other people, and it is never my way to make such a fuss about trifles. To tell the truth I had a letter from Dick, which I thought it well not to shew her. Why you know under any circumstances when each has such strongly marked idiosyncrasies their wills would be sure to clash. But ordinary human nature is not enough for Zina. It was only the other day I heard her declare she would never have married a man who had once sown his wild oats—not unless he had repented—and



George Layton is not the sort of man to repent."

Zina knew next to nothing of the gossip which was going on. She resented Eva's speeches which were intended for hits, and told herself that they were wide of the mark, stiffening into stone when that officious lady volunteered her good advice. But none the less was she conscious that her husband's mood was no longer auspicious, whilst he too was aware of a sort of personal removal from him conveyed in her speech, and her manner which had cooled. If a suspicion of him occurred to her she tried to cloak it from herself, to hide it in innumerable folds; but she might have known by the dull aching at her heart that it was always there. Had she been happier the company in the house might have ministered to her sense of humour. There were match-making mothers who bungled terribly and showed their hands, old ladies who squabbled furtively over their cards, and for the first time—sporting men who thought of nothing but foxes. But she began to feel as if she were always on the rack.

The luxurious afternoon teas with the introduction, which she was unable to prevent, not only of champagne but of numerous brandies and sodas, and cigarettes for both sexes, fretted her with an odd sense of her new house-keeping responsibilities; and when she found that she was obliged to order larks, and *pâté-de-foie-gras* (two luxuries which she had tabooed on the score of cruelty) to vary the *menus* for dinner, her irritation increased. George insisted on both and she had to give way, as she had to give way about the smoking. They were but little things, but little things which gave a clue to the tone of the guests.

"Michelet, my dear, declared in vain that tobacco drew the line between men and women. A pretty woman never looks so well as with a cigarette between



her lips — we are coming to the days when the cigarette will take the place of the fan in flirtation," laughed George, when she remonstrated till, ashamed of her scruples, she ceased protesting.

But it would have been so much pleasanter if George had been poor—oh, how she sympathised with Tennyson's heroine! If George were only a landscape painter, or if his collars and cuffs had been jagged and his coat the worse for wear, she would have liked him better. But his excessive care for his personal appearance began to be revolting, and she would have liked it better had they fed on lentil soup, milk and porridge, or bread and cheese, than on the various courses of luxurious food which she was expected to order twice every day for luncheon and dinner.

She was perpetually hoodwinking her conscience when it reminded her of how low she had fallen from her exalted ideal.

The woman who was a *divorcée* and an inveterate flirt still starred it in her drawing-rooms looking to good advantage with porcelain complexion, *bandeaux à la vierge* and pretty frocks of turquoise-blue, or delicate Nile-green. And Zina had not only become used to giving up her love of retirement and constantly living in a world of brilliant lights, smart dresses and white shirt-fronts, but she had learnt to listen to Eva's fibs, without contradicting them.

How ridiculous, as Mrs. Capern had tried to explain to her, to refuse to avail oneself of that temporary insincerity without which it would be impossible for the world to get on.

"Ah I knew you would recognise it sooner or later," said Eva laughing. "A woman must have a weapon of that kind; a little pocket-pistol carried for self-protection."

"It is vanity," she said on another occasion, "which



makes the world go round. I knew that sooner or later you would have to give in to it, like the rest of us." After that Mrs. Layton kept her own counsel.

She did not confide to Eva that she felt somehow as if drops of ink had fallen on the white ermine of her life and stained it. Now and then there was time to reflect when she retired into the privacy of her own boudoir, in which the resources of modern science had been so skilfully combined with mediæval art to minister to her comfort. Tears came into her eyes when she remembered how her husband had done his utmost to make this retreat beautiful. The soft radiance of electric light, shaded by coloured glasses, was shed upon alabaster and ivory which had been brought from Italy, the workmanship of which was said to have been superintended by Canova. A marble figure copied from one of Thorwaldsen's designs stood on a porphyry pillar surrounded by flowering plants. The hot-water pipes which warmed the apartment whenever it was damp or cold were carefully concealed beneath drapery, and on the walls were pieces of tapestry collected also in foreign travel, in which all things pretty and round, from pomegranates to cupids and apples, were spread as a feast before the eyes. Some brocade curtains, ornamented with heavy old gold fringes and standing on end with richness—as our grandmothers' dresses were said to stand alone when our manufacturers thought more about beauty and durability than variety; an ebony table with a casket from Ghent in which the delicately carved doors closed on a beautifully painted copy of the quaint Madonna by Van Eyck. Strange animals from Japan, and idols from India, with the sphinxlike figures and writhing, mystic forms by which half-cultured nations have endeavoured to solve the riddle of this painful Earth, were all here.



So were carvings of ebony, and sandalwood, *jardinières* of Satsuma, *faience plaques*, beautiful stuffs from the looms of Persia, gleaming embroidery from the East, Sèvres and Dresden china with Salviati glasses from Venice. It was as much of a museum or curiosity-shop as a boudoir, and yet the whole formed an interior of luxury and beauty such as few women could afford to indulge in. But George had showered luxury upon her; he had given her all this, like the diamonds upon her fingers and the bracelets upon her arms. She did not undervalue his gifts, but she felt crushed, like Tarpeia, beneath the weight of them, and there were hours when all these marvels of artistic and modern civilisation filled her with a sort of dread which might at any moment turn to loathing. She detested some of the men and women with whom he was forcing her to associate—the light tone of their talk, their jests and their laughter—and asked herself if the love of beauty might not be used to conceal the microbes of moral disease which were tainting the atmosphere. Semiramis—Cleopatra—Nero—had they not all loved beauty?

The first winter of her married life had scarcely passed, and she was still anticipating the coming Easter, when she privately hoped that many of her London guests, Mrs. Capern amongst them, would be flitting home to prepare for their usual gaieties and she might look forward to having her husband once more to herself. But already she was beginning to discover that he who surrounded her with these objects of *vertu* was equally fastidious about the appearance of his wife. Her morning dresses, made in such a style as to imitate the flowing drapery of the Greeks, with her hair coiled round her head, and her embroidered slippers, had to be as elaborately studied as her evening costumes. And whether or not there was any bitterness rankling in her heart



she had to study her toilette carefully and go down elaborately dressed at the sound of the dinner-gong. She had married a critic of women's beauty as well as of the decorative beauty of his house, one who rallied her when she was grave on the severity of her outlines, and told her to beware lest her features should grow hard when she was an old woman. The knowledge that he would no longer care for her when she ceased to give pleasure to his eyes did not make her wince; it roused, on the contrary, the spirit of indignation, and she was ready with a new antagonism to flout the beauty which ministered to the meaner part of him.

She would have given all that she now possessed for one sign of the pure affection in which she had believed in the past, but she refused to minister to his vanity by taking greater pains with her self-adornment.

"By Jove, if you don't take care, you will soon be growing old!" he said one day, when the morning light fell full on her anxious face.

She was not a child to complain of receiving a cold douche, but felt that he could have made his disparaging remark in a manner less chilling. She raised her eyes to his inquiringly. With those speaking eyes of hers she had asked a thousand wild questions which her lips could never have framed during these last few weeks of their suspended intercourse—questions about things indefinite and intangible which could never have been put into words. She was ready herself to admit how they might be the veriest light thistle-down of a woman's imagination. But now she spoke on the impulse of the moment, and regretted her speech, directly it was uttered.

"Is it true," she panted out, looking at him with those dilated eyes, "that you are a man soon weary of the best one woman can give you? Is it true," she continued, lowering her voice, "that you did



not mean to marry me till you were forced by circumstances? Was the suggestion contained in that letter correct—after all? Answer me—my life depends on the answer.”

But he put her off with an evasion. “What nonsense is this; we have been married too long to make any pretence at getting up a scene, like a pair of quarrelsome lovers. Women are so fond of these comedies of errors,” he said, taking the initiative.

He prided himself on the cleverness of his skillfully-worded retort. Why should he have the comfort of his house destroyed by this sort of jealousy? he asked himself; he was a man of the world, he had never pretended to be anything else, and must protect himself against such questions, and against the discussion of hackneyed subjects.

He had little or no suspicion of her mental torture, and still less of her growing disgusted when she declared to herself that perhaps he had won her by a lie—and that the whole of their married life was possibly based on a hideous falsehood—a gross deception—one which he might have known from the beginning that she would be certain to find out sooner or later.



## CHAPTER VII.

### DISILLUSION.

THE next few days were passed by Zina in a state of nervous excitement, in which she would hardly allow herself time to think, so as to realise the torture which her heart was undergoing. She was afraid of any more sudden scenes in which she might ask unwise questions, and willing to accuse her own temper rather than be ready to suppose that her husband could purposely have left her to infer that a suspicion was correct which would have altered their mutual relations so thoroughly.

"He could not have been in earnest," she said to herself on the following morning, "he merely meant me to understand that the question was a painful one, and he refused to discuss it. His irony was open; he took no steps to conceal it; I was a fool to suppose he could have been in earnest. My character is, perhaps, after all, a little too much inclined to suspicion."

She made up her mind once again not to be a drag



upon him, but to try to see things a little more from his point of view, lest everything should be wrecked between them. "A man so universally admired, and so brilliant as he is, can afford to admit bitter things against himself; perhaps he wanted to see how much I, in my mad passion, could believe," she said, taking herself to task, as once more she took her place at the dinner-table, doing her best to look radiant and smiling amongst the people who surrounded her—time having made her a better adept in trying to manage to look happy when appearances were deceitful.

The habit of studying other people, and treating them as if they were things apart from herself helped her in this, and she was learning by degrees, amongst Layton's friends, not to let her standard be too high or exacting, dimly comprehending, and yet not making open strictures.

She went so far as to be vexed with herself for her unresponsive manner, trying hard to rouse herself and spare her husband disappointment. Had not George been very good to her, and did he not deserve all the social successes which might come to him through her? If some of the women to whom he introduced her were a little difficult for her to get on with, there were others whom she liked, and she determined to continue to do her best for the entertainment of all, telling herself that quick compliance with George Layton's wishes would be the only way in which she could remedy the new differences between them.

It was only one who knew her well, like Eva Capern, who could be struck by her pallor, and the occasional, reproachful look in her pure, proud face, or who would be likely to notice that the eyes which were so large and full of light would be now sometimes dimmed in a strange way; missing in them—as George Layton had missed—the bright-



ness, the spontaneous pleasure in life, which during the time of her sojourn abroad had been characteristic. It was not likely to trouble Eva, as it had troubled George Layton, that her hostess and rival was perceptibly aging, but she did not wish matters to come to a crisis between Layton and his wife. It was too pleasant a house to visit at, and she watched matters a little anxiously, having wit enough to know that she had already jarred on Zina, to whom she had never proved an agreeable or appreciative companion, and that she could not interpose any more without infringing the laws of hospitality.

Meanwhile, Zina pursued her programme of meeting her husband without uttering a word of reproach. She wished to meet him as if there were no bone to pick between them, and Eva—who watched her intently—found little excuse for uttering with a scornful laugh, “What a goose she is!” For “Zina *was* a goose, there was no doubt of it,” the woman of the world had long ago decided—a fool, with her fine ideals and her standards of propriety—but it was evident to her that, however these ideals might be shattered, the “fool” was determined to keep up appearances before other people.

It seemed as if all might have gone well, but that on one evening, on her return from a stroll in the garden, Zina, as she came up the terraced steps, was attracted by the sound of voices in the entrance-hall. “Be off with you! I tell you the master is busy and cannot be disturbed,” said the man-servant, whose tones were raised harshly and gruffly.

Zina stood listening in surprise, with the door ajar so that she could not be seen, and found to her consternation that the insolent words were addressed to a girl who looked almost like a lady, though her little cashmere dress was shabby, and



of a faded hue. The figure was small and youthful, and the poise of the head on the neck was graceful, while the expression of the little pale face was appealing and sad. The child—for she was not more than fifteen—had evidently a faithful woman's heart in her slight and half-starved body. She said something in a low voice which she did not finish, for Zina stepped forward and rebuked the man for his rudeness. Anything like oppression to helpless children or innocent animals had always roused her indignation, and the man stood cowering before her as—with her usually pale face glowing with passion, and her arm extended as if to enforce attention—she poured forth her generous, indignant words, telling him that if he ever ventured to insult a young lady again he should be dismissed within the hour from service in her house.

The man muttered something which she did not hear, and slunk off like a beaten dog rather than face again the fire in her eyes, and then she turned round to look for the child. But to her amazement the girl had fled. The slight figure with faded skirt, and narrow hips, which were rather suggestive of a boy than a girl, could just be seen flying round the corner, where a plantation of laurels hid her from view. Zina's first thought was to hasten in pursuit of her and apologise for the way in which she had been treated; her second to go to her husband and inform him of the circumstances.

He was in his study, sitting in a somewhat dejected attitude, leaning his face upon his hand. In her state of agitation Zina entered the room hastily, forgetting to knock as usual, and he started up when he found her standing by his side.

"How did you come in?" he asked abruptly.

And she answered as laconically, "By the door."

He shrugged his shoulders.



It was not an opportune moment. Her husband was evidently occupied, and it was perhaps natural that he should be vexed when she burst in upon him. Something in her panting excitement which did not seem to him "good form" had evidently jarred upon him. It was inconsistent with the dignity which he had always admired in her. She might be icy in her manner and in her dealings with his pet associates, but he had always told himself in his secret heart that the manner in itself was superb. He did not admire the change in it, and he himself was suffering. A look of anxiety, almost of desperation, was on his face. It was with an evident effort that he roused himself even to speak to her.

But neither fear nor expediency counted for anything in her great excitement, as she—misinterpreting his vexation, and nettled that he should so little have appreciated the efforts she had made to please him, crediting him with the best—said again "Let me remind you that I have a right to come. I trust my coming does not annoy you. Who should tell you, if I did not, when things go on wrongly in this household?" And then in a breathless and agitated way she poured out the story of the footman's insolence.

"I have come to you because I expect you to back me up in our own house," she said, unconsciously clenching her hand, "I am sure you will feel as strongly as I feel myself that a man who speaks rudely to an innocent girl insults *me* in the person of one of my own sex."

There was silence for a space of time which was in reality short, but which seemed to her long, counted by the beatings of her heart. He had turned slightly away from her as if all his attention were concentrated on watching a bar of sunshine which at this time of the afternoon fell aslant the dark evergreens near the window, look-



ing as if the sunbeams were cast of solid gold.

She wondered, after a minute had elapsed, if he had heard her, or if she had offended him by her expressive gesture. And then, for the first time, she began to be frightened at the way in which his brows drew together, describing a thick, black ridge over his sullen eyes. He was not handsome so; he was positively alarming; and yet only a little while ago she had called herself a brave woman, and had imagined that she could never be terrified at anything. Only that little while ago she could have wounded herself, like Cæsar's wife, to prove her love and gratitude for this man. A dagger would have had no terror for her, but this new sort of intentness, with which he gazed at her as if he were meditating his answer and intending to frighten her, deprived her of her boasted valour.

A presentiment of coming evil made her silent in her turn.

At last he said:

"Pardon me for answering you in your own coin—We look at these things from different stand-points—can there be any good in discussing them? And let me remind *you* when you talk about rights, that *I* also have a right to my own individuality. The man Matthews acted by my orders, and I have my reasons for those orders—reasons which I do not think necessary to explain, even to my wife."

She remained staring at him—jeering at herself, as she had tried to jeer at herself lately for the foolish presentiments of her own heated imagination.

"I believe in the rights of man. Do you call that heresy, or philosophical theology?" he asked in the light tone of banter to which she was becoming accustomed, as she was to the scornful curl of his lip. "You believe also in the rights of woman? Well and good, but the one set of rights cannot



supersede the other; you must promise me not to interfere with my affairs."

Her heart ached very painfully as she had to be content with this answer, but she resented the thought that there was a mystery behind—what should her husband have to do with mysteries? A secret kept from her by the man whom she trusted would be the one offence she would find it difficult to forgive. While she confided in him fully and freely, she felt that she ought to expect the same confidences in return. Expect? Was it likely she would have them? Was not this the second time he had not only withheld his confidence, but left her baffled and sick at heart, to infer the worst from his ominous silence.

"It is only to try me. Oh! I feel quite sure it *must* be only to try me," she thought a few hours afterwards as she dressed for dinner, doing her best to repress the great tide of indignation which was swelling in her breast. She had given orders to her maid not to come to her that evening, but her heart beat suddenly faster as she heard the sound of a light knock at the door of her dressing-room, and a letter was put into her hands by the girl, who said in a whisper, "Matthews says he didn't venture to keep it back, but the master would be that angry if he happened to know about it."

Zina felt almost guilty as she took the letter. It was in a childish handwriting and written evidently with difficulty:—"Lady, My sister is dying. It is at the same cottage where the stones were thrown at you the other day. That was not our fault; my poor sister cried about it. I have told her how kind you look, and she says though you are the last person in the world she ought to ask to see, yet she has no one else on earth: no one but me and our old nurse, in whose cottage she is dying; and she has something she *must* tell before she dies."



The letter had no signature but a scribbled name which looked like "Daisy." Zina's heart beat suddenly faster as she read it, and she began to feel as if she were walking on a mine. Who could tell what disclosures might come if she went to the cottage—the same cottage, the very mention of which had roused her husband's anger before?

She took her place at the dinner-table with a wretched sense of distrust—a sort of feeling of trying to enjoy herself just once, and after that the Deluge. For the first time she felt as if it were a miserable comfort to have these people round her, to be saved from a *tête-à-tête* just then with the man whom she began to dread as much as she had loved him; to be obliged to talk ordinary chit-chat, and to see that the servants performed their duties properly.

She had no longer time to be troubled by small conscientious difficulties, such as the paying at a high price, and keeping up the demand, for commodities cruelly obtained. Indeed the handing of the *entrées*, and even the fear lest the ice-pudding should not be dished up properly (things which generally did not trouble her), seemed mercifully to shield her from the malady of thought. She sat at the head of the table smiling and trying to eat, making a great show with her knife and fork, and hiding the fact that only infinitesimal morsels found their way to her mouth. A *raconteur* who was present told tales which were greeted with laughter—tales capped by a lady who prided herself on her store of anecdotage—*tant peu risqué*, as she said herself. But Zina had never more thoroughly realised how all her own mirth had disappeared: the clashing chords of the merriment annoyed her, the jarring modulations could not reconcile her to the music. She did not guess that Eva was watching her anxiously as usual, as



*A Waking.*

under the cover of the laughter her brow contracted, and the corners of her mouth twitched as she leaned back in her chair. She was making up her mind to venture the desperate throw of a lonely walk to that cottage early on the following morning. She knew that it would be hopeless to try to escape that evening, but in the morning she could plead her pressing need for a walk.

She slept little that night. Her heart was filled with an aching pity, yet she told herself in the weary hours that there was nothing to alarm her, that she was wrong to allow herself as on a former occasion to become the prey of a morbid imagination, and then dropping asleep to dream that once more, as in Switzerland, she had fallen into a snare spread for her by a forging enemy and that the handwriting was feigned—to wake again to the reality.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### A FATAL DISCOVERY.

ZINA stood irresolute on the threshold of the cottage the next morning, determined not to sink to the moral depth of a spy, and yet conscious of an impending horror, which sent a chill as if of ice through her veins. For she had not even closed the door before the garrulous old woman, who had evidently qualms of conscience for the way in which she had treated Mrs. Layton before, began pouring out a story which made Zina's heart stand still.

At first she was even a little ashamed herself for her impulsiveness in having come, and was determined to keep her presence of mind in the emergency. It was perfectly ridiculous, as she had been telling herself all through the night, to suppose that she should find out anything which could seriously affect George; all the same it would be cruel for her to refuse to visit this girl's sick sister; if there were a mystery, it was *her* duty to clear it up.



But alas, as she listened to the old woman's tale strange corroborations came to her memory!

The story might be perfectly imaginary, or it might be cooked up in spite, and yet, like the refractory fragments of a puzzle fitting into a definite outline so that instead of incongruities one begins to perceive a definite plan—it fitted into all that had been difficult to explain in her married life. It was as if her reasoning power had been in thralldom before, and the iron gates swung open when a key was fitted into them. For the first time she understood, and the revelation was blinding.

Upstairs a girl lay dying, who was younger than Zina—only five-and-twenty. And this girl, who had been a governess, had come, some years before, in the vacation, with her younger sister, an orphan like herself, to visit the old nurse who had taken care of them in their infancy. Mr. Layton had paid his addresses to her, and afterwards—unknown to the nurse—he had followed her to another place—a country place, very secluded, where she had spent other holidays, and in the quietness of the country he had gone through the ceremony of marriage. A child had been born after this marriage—a marriage which had proved to be a mock ceremony, conducted by a mock clergyman—and the child was now between two and three years old. The young mother had fallen dangerously ill when she found that her supposed husband refused to acknowledge her. Stricken by fever and almost penniless, she had dragged herself once more to her old nurse's cottage, and now, in her last hours, she refused to see a priest, and only asked for justice from the man who had abandoned her. He had offered to make an ample provision for herself and the child, but she had faced starvation rather than take his money. And it was still with the idea of asserting her innocence, that she sent for the lady who occu-



pied the place which was rightfully hers, to shew what she had imagined to be her wedding lines, a foolish document by which she had been deceived, and to entreat her to help her.

"And I also might have fallen into the same snare; a mere accident saved me," Zina was thinking to herself as she stood erect like a statue, not moving a muscle or shewing a sign of emotion. "My instincts were correct, the snare was laid for *me*, though I blamed myself for recurring to the subject in a moment of passion. I know now why it haunted me," the voice within her continued as she sank into a chair, thinking, characteristically, less of the danger she had escaped than of the moral contamination she had incurred in coming in contact with one of those easy, unprincipled, self-indulgent men on whom so much love is wasted, and by whom so many lives are wrecked.

She was not what could be generally called a "goody" woman, still less a saintly one; she had thought little or nothing about Christianity since the days when she had discussed it with Mary as if it had been an intellectual problem, putting it aside from her as a thing she could not understand. Nor had she anything in common with the prudish British matron, who would draw her skirts away from touching a sister in degradation. But she was an idealist like Shelley, looking upon all moral depravity as a crime against the spiritual nature of man, and, to a woman of her temperament, a revelation of this kind was harder to endure than it would be to most women, for she had a fastidious shrinking from anything which was unrefined. And as sensation after sensation flashed upon her, she all at once began to shiver—not so much at the knowledge of the peril which had threatened her, as at the mental vision of the degradation which was actually hers.



"Take me up to her," was all she said, still shivering as in midwinter, though it was a warm day in early spring. And an hour afterwards, instead of presiding over the dainties at the usual midday meal, Zina was still sitting by the bedside in that upstairs attic. The light, which shone through the latticed windows, was so obscure that at first she could only see that some one lay in the bed, and that a ragged curtain had been fastened up to screen the occupant of what might rather be called a wooden pallet than a bed, from the draught of the door. The room was otherwise neat and clean. A small fire was burning in the grate, and the little hearth was freshly swept. As her eyes became by degrees accustomed to the light, she could see that the sufferer in the bed was supported by her younger sister, and that there was a strong personal likeness between the two. Both had eyes like agates, both had the same regular, small, refined features, and both the same droop in the corners of the lips. But the eyes of the dying woman were unnaturally large and wild, and her face painfully emaciated.

"She has been a cruel sufferer," said the old woman, who had followed, limping painfully, up the stairs, as she went nearer to the sick woman, and lay her furrowed forehead against the thin cheek with a groan.

The younger woman did not answer; she was panting for breath. With one hand she held a small paper, which nothing could persuade her to give up, and with the other she pointed to a little golden-haired child playing on the foot of the bed.

"They be her marriage lines, and she wants thee to see that she had them proper, and to promise to let some one take care of the child; she told us before thy coming that she had made up her mind to *that*, not to accept *his* money, but to leave *thee*



to see to it," the old woman explained, interpreting the dumb actions.

"There are hospitals, and places, where some one would see to Baby, and she thought perhaps it would not be too much to ask, if you would try to get her a ticket of admission," vaguely interposed the frightened sister.

Zina nodded her head; she would have promised almost anything at that moment; all calculating prudences, and all minor considerations being waived in the presence of the death of a fellow-mortal. But as she drew nearer the bed and took the hand of the sufferer in hers, any spectator might have noticed, had the light been more effective, that she had turned of as deadly a hue as the dying woman. She had a more violent fit of the shivering which had attacked her downstairs, but controlled it, looking at the suffering woman with moistened eyes as she struggled and fought for speech, her sister endeavouring to help her by pouring out some liquid which lay on the table, and putting it to her lips. But she was evidently past swallowing, though by a determined effort she raised her weary head, and motioned to a large Bible which lay on the table.

"It is for thee to pray and read," continued the faithful nurse, who was evidently well skilled in interpreting every motion of her darling's lips; "she wouldn't let the parson come nigh her. He called her a shameless and wicked girl, and said she ought to be driven away from the place."

Could any request have come more strangely to Zina? She felt confounded and stupefied as she opened the pages of the Bible, which had evidently been kept as an heirloom to be stared at rather than read. "Read to her yourself," she said with an effort, and then was conscious of the absurdity of that request to the revengeful hag to whose lips cursing had come nearer than blessing.



"Thou'lt not refuse her when she be brought so low—thou hast been *that* good to her, to come and see her at all, and no doubt thou'st known suffering too," pleaded the old woman, in her now softened mood, in a whining voice, whilst the pleading was repeated in the longing eyes of the little sister, whose delicate arm shook as if palsied beneath the weight it was supporting.

Zina could not read, she knew not where to turn to in the old-fashioned Book; but after minutes spent in battling with its unaccustomed pages she found herself unable to resist the earnest entreaty in the childlike eyes of the dying creature who had no mother's gown to pluck at in her great extremity. Some outward force seemed to compel her as she sank upon her knees, and stammered out "Our Father, which art in Heaven," the only simple, old-fashioned words she could remember to utter. Both women were as children crying in the night "with no language but a cry."



## CHAPTER IX.

### AN UNEXPECTED RESOLUTION.

IT was afternoon when Zina returned to her home, and even then she did not enter the house, but sought a sequestered part of the garden, a neglected part of the shrubbery which was called the "wilderness," to make an attempt to collect her thoughts. She had need to make the attempt, for it seemed to her as if she had been brought in contact with unutterable horrors, and ill-omened shapes of evil—as if she had suddenly awakened to the knowledge of a darkness which could never again be irradiated for her. It was the latter part of April, and in the coppice amongst the underwood, primroses and violets were already blowing. The chestnuts were unfolding their sticky sheaths, and a delicate veil of green, foretelling the coming foliage, was shimmering over birch and beech in the more open spaces. But Zina, lover as she was of the Spring, saw nothing of this—neither did she feel the rain which was falling on her unprotected



face. It was as if she had spent hundreds of years in the last few hours and could never feel young again.

Everything around her was in bud with fulfilment of promise, though the promises of her own future could never now be fulfilled. In the dark bedroom of that cottage a new and sudden light had flashed upon her in which she was able to piece together trifles which had staggered her more than once in the past; trifles which she had attempted to reason away but which she now saw to have fatally indicated character. It was as if she had suddenly found a clue to all that had puzzled her; the veil had been torn away against her will; she wished with a groan that it had been possible to swathe herself in it again. For the light was hideous as well as blinding; every atom of evidence pointing to a conclusion which was incontrovertible, every inference in the past burning itself into her mind. Still there was just a hope that George Layton would be able to justify himself.

After a time he sought her; he had been seeking her since lunch in every room of the house and in every corner of the garden. She had known that the interview with him must come sooner or later, and though the thought of meeting him was a thought to make her cringe with terror, brave as she usually was, she could not help remembering with a bitter sense of humour that now it was *her* turn to resent the intrusion on *her* privacy. She had come to the "wilderness" with the idea of collecting her thoughts but she had known that sooner or later he would seek her. She stood at a little distance as if she dreaded his personal proximity. She had always shrunk from men of this sort with physical repugnance, a sort of loathing which made her feel it impossible to touch them; and she now awoke to all the horror



of her position; for her ideas of wifely devotion were exalted, and one of these men was her—*husband!*

For the first time in her life she was ashamed, with a deeper shame for his sake—a shame which made her hate to lift her eyes to his face.

“Where have you been all this time? People have been asking after you,” he said as he watched her standing aside in this eccentric fashion, looking pale and pinched, no doubt from hunger and fatigue.

The rain was falling on her hair and face, but she did not heed it.

“Zina, did you not know that it was very odd of you—almost rude—to absent yourself like this?”

When she assented it was absently, the sound of her own name sending the blood rushing to her face. But when he took a step forward she turned from him abruptly, and then he saw that she was trembling violently, though all her attention seemed to be concentrated in struggling to button a refractory glove.

“You admit that you *did* know it; really your conduct is *most* eccentric,” he repeated, still advancing as he spoke. He was smoking as usual, and when she put out her hand as if she would keep him back he tried to interpret her action by a woman’s objection to smoke. Yet she had never objected in this way before, and he began to think he understood it all. His refusal on a former occasion to answer her question had probably led to some foolish gossip. The new sort of repugnance, the strung-up nerves, and the morbid horror in her face could have but one explanation, and he cursed the mischief-makers in his heart, whilst he congratulated himself that as he had changed all his servants at the time of his marriage the gossip must have been kept within bounds and could do no great harm. It would be easy to contradict it.



"What nonsense this is! You look as if you had been worrying yourself again. Leave meddling and worrying to narrow-minded folk—It is not as if you were jealous, but you are not perfectly exempt from another fault of your sex. All women have been *curious* since the days of Eve," he said disingenuously; for though there was a certain amount of truth in the platitudes easy of utterance he knew that they did not meet the case. He prided himself on keeping his temper under terrible provocation, and on determining not to allow any expression of annoyance to escape him. "So long as you don't overdo the Lady Bountiful by making the villagers discontented and grasping, there is no objection to your taking a lonely walk, though the ramble should be within reasonable bounds; you look tired and worn-out."

Till then she had been trying to survey the facts impartially and to believe him innocent till the charge was proved against him. But now her heart fainted within her, for he himself had betrayed his discomfort, and the time to put him to the test was coming, even sooner than she had anticipated.

"I *have* been to the village," she said, "and I have had a very good reason for absenting myself from lunch, for I have been sitting with a dying woman who needed me much more than anyone else could need me."

Even now she hesitated and found it difficult to go on. Her natural shrinking from those hectic subjects which she had hitherto refused to touch—subjects which had never been discussed even at her father's table, but which in deference to her modesty had been covered with many veils, hidden away, decently buried, or only allowed to flaunt their unhallowed heads in disreputable corners of the earth—came upon her in its old force. Then she took courage and obliged herself to continue.



"Oh, if *you* had seen the sight you would be unable to forget it—the woful eyes, haggard and wild, heavy and large, which only could speak the reproaches her voice refused to utter. When I left her she had relapsed into a state of unconsciousness; but oh! I am thankful that I stayed so long, and still more thankful to think that before the morning the Angel of Death will release her from her misery. Death is better than life for her, and perhaps, also, for *me*."

Her voice betrayed no emotion; her face, on which the rain was still falling, wore a look as if the feeling had been forced in and a door had been shut on it. "The name of the dying woman is Agnes Morton," she continued, in the same level tone, "her sister Daisy wrote to ask me to come and see her."

And then she stood watching him with her fingers interlaced, wrung together till the pressure of the nails seemed to injure the delicate flesh in spite of the gloves she wore, staring at him, as he remembered afterwards, with wide-orbed eyes.

The hardening of his face as her steady eyes seemed to penetrate him, and the ashy change in his complexion, as, throwing away his cigar and stamping on it in his fury, he uttered an oath beneath his breath, confirmed her horrible dread. Her heart stood still, and she gave a little cry—a cry which was strangled in its utterance—as she felt that the question which she had been so fearful of asking had already been answered. To have the last hope destroyed with which she had fondly deluded herself was too much for the equanimity which she had hoped to be able to keep up, and she threw up her hands with a sudden impulse—an impulse of despair.

"Then you brought me here," she said, in a voice hoarse with excitement, "for *what*? To humiliate me to the dust?"



The blushes on her face seemed to sting it. Yet her words goaded him; he paced the path impatiently as if he would escape from a scourge. But she continued, more to herself than to him, "Till this moment I had hoped it would prove to be false—I had hoped against hope even when I left the cottage. But I see now there is no getting out of the circumstantial evidence which hems you in like an iron circle—no denying these overwhelming proofs of your guilt."

Again her face stung; she stooped to hide it from his gaze.

He turned and faced her, "I did not know you were so absurd; you must learn to control this wildness. You are not an innocent, and you ought to understand these things. I could not have married a little innocent like the majority of girls. If the woman you have just seen had not been unreasonable she would have had nothing to complain of; she——"

"Oh, George!" she interrupted, passionately, "it is a poor compliment you pay me if you think——"

"My dear, I think nothing that you do not want me to think. Let us talk it out like sensible beings. It is the habit of some men to treat women in a tender, patronising manner, as if they were helpless infants and knew nothing about the world, and it is the notion of the majority of women to assume this helpless innocence; but you and I have never kept up this pretty little fiction. You have never pretended to go to church, say your prayers, and all the rest of it; whilst on the other hand you have read largely, browsed, as Charles Lamb would call it, on all sorts of literature—and excuse me if I say that I naturally expected you would view these things in a larger, more comprehensive way than a sulky schoolgirl."

"Your joke and your joking is in the worst of taste," she cried in an agonised voice, which shewed



him, somewhat to his surprise, that he was outraging and offending all that was delicate in her nature. But she did not argue further. The subject had always seemed to her one of those which were undebatable, and she had no idea of exhausting her power of persuasion, or hiding her feeling of repulsion.

The fierce anger which glittered in her eyes and sounded in her hard, deep breathing roused him as perhaps nothing else could have done.

Never before had he seen that luminous intensity in any woman's face; he admired but was not touched by it.

"You need not turn on me with your eyes gleaming like a fury's, and make all sorts of wild accusations," he said, and her anger was succeeded by a great shock of pain.

The change of things had been so tremendous from the seventh Heaven to the lowest Hell during the last few months that it made her forget her usual self-control.

The half-truths, sharper than lies, by which he had tried to excuse himself, had struck like arrows to her heart. And yet she had sense enough to remember that her passion lowered her; others had suffered the same reverses before, and had suffered them with more or less self-control, and she made an effort to conquer her emotion. An excruciating agony, as if something had suddenly snapped in the machinery of her brain, or as if the blood which went to her heart had been hindered in its flow, kept her speechless for a moment or two, gasping as if for breath. Then she said in the emotionless voice which she had forced herself to use at the beginning of the interview:

"You asked me to talk like a sensible being, and I will try to do so. I have nothing more to do with the past, but I have to face the future. My conduct



must be guided by circumstances, and those circumstances it has become necessary for me to know. You married Agnes Morton under false pretences. Hear me speak," she said calmly, as he tried to interrupt her; "it is not necessary for you to explain that you did not *really* marry her—I am coming to that presently, and our opinions may differ about it—it suffices for what I want to say that you *pretended* to marry her, and that you tried to play the same trick upon me. I asked you once before, when my temper got the better of me, and when I did not really think it, if that anonymous warning had not been sent to me would you have brought me to a state like *that*? You said *then*—O how clearly I remember—that it was not possible you could deceive *me, or any other woman who confided in you*. What about this woman and her childlike confidence? Knowing her story as I do now, I ask you once again, slowly and deliberately, if that letter had not been sent should I not have been now in the same position as that unfortunate?"

They looked at each other for a space of time which seemed to each of them interminable; in reality it would have been scarcely appreciable to an outsider.

Her bosom rose and fell, her deeply heaved sighs told of her distress, but having determined to strike home and not to flinch, she never removed her eyes from his face. He tried to return her glance indifferently as if he himself had been an outsider, and had nothing to do with her unfounded suspicions. Then he dropped his eyelids and shifted his feet. In such moments our senses are miraculously sharpened, and she was aware of a little impatient movement of his hands, never averting her gaze till he again lifted his eyes, unconscious of a scarcely noticeable tremor of the lip, and tried to reassure her by a smile, as he said, "I am not



a lawyer; how could you expect me to be up in all the ins and outs of Swiss law?"

It was one more of those half-truths which involve a falsehood: a direct lie would have been less painful to her.

She had braced herself to bear the sharpest twinge of agony. "It will be quick," she had said to herself, "it will be soon over, but I must bear it," and now she was thrown back on one of his old attempts to trifle with her.

After all that had happened he could look at her with a self-satisfied attempt at a smile, and try to deceive her still with one of those juggleries which a clever man, priding himself on his sleight of hand, can so often practise successfully on a woman who blindly trusts him. She hated him at that moment. Heaven knew that he was far enough from laughing in his secret heart, but what was there in his mood which made the smile break into a nervous laugh, meant to be good-tempered and indulgent of her whims? The laugh grated on her nerves, and increased her feeling of aversion; in her highly-wrought state it suggested more than he had said.

"You joke," she repeated bitterly. "Louis XV. joked the day when the Pompadour's funeral passed by his window. He said she had bad weather. It is bad weather with me now, and what is it with your first wife, who is dying like a beggar?"

"All this is a little fantastic, you know. Am I responsible for the wild fancies of a poor woman who is dying, cursed with a fever-stricken, morbid imagination? Before giving vent to language which is so excitable and grotesque, and which is difficult for me to forgive, don't you think it would be better to trust your husband a little more?"

He had recovered himself now, and stood surveying her with folded arms.

Never had his admiration for her been greater.



He took in all the "points" as he stood watching her, the supple figure, the clear investigating eyes, and the air of perfect finish even at a moment like this. He had suffered much in the interview but reflected with a feeling of triumph that the odds of such a contest between a man and his wife were always on the side of the man.

His smile had even become a little patronising as he continued, almost pityingly, "My dear child, you are what the Americans would call 'high falutin.'"

Again the words were ready to rush forth like a torrent from her lips, and again she controlled herself. If he did not understand—if his nature was so entirely alien from hers—of what use would it be to try and make him understand? Still it was her duty to make one more effort.

"It is really of little consequence so far as I am concerned. You formed a union before you married me, and you were bound by that tie as long as the woman lived; under no pretext whatever could you violate it; so that the ceremony you went through with me did not really amount to much."

"You are raving," he said, "and your raving is only injurious to yourself."

"I do not think so," she continued coldly and clearly. "The position of *myself* has really nothing to do with it, except that I wanted to find out whether you meditated putting the same indignity upon another woman which you had already put upon one. I do not recognise one law for the woman and another for the man; such a social system is absurd and wrong. I never pretended to be much of a Christian, but I understand the principles of Christianity just as they were written, and so far as the moral code goes I agree with it—a moral ideal which demands everything or nothing.



Each man one wife and each woman one husband, and never to forsake each other under any pretext whatever."

Again, he did not wish to lose his temper, but it seemed to him that a sort of madness had seized hold of his wife. "This is childish," he repeated, "and just the sort of childishness which I should not have expected from you."

It was not only that all remnant of her love had been killed in an hour or two, so that there was no possibility of reviving it; not only was it evident from her white, drawn face that she had suffered as much as it was possible for a human being to suffer, but that she was reasoning against her own position as an honourable woman in society. He had learnt to value her, and he could not bear it.

"You left Agnes Morton to bear the consequences of your sin; it was base, cowardly, and cruel," she continued in the same voice. "If it had not been for my wedding you would have left me too. I have to thank what some people would call a lucky accident for the difference between us, but I do not wish to accept that difference."

He stared in astonishment. "But *she*—the case *is* utterly different," he began; "you cannot know what you are saying."

"Oh, don't bring that up against her! *You* should be the last to say so. The world is brutally hard in the case of the woman, while it condones lots of evil in a man. Now that I have placed myself on a par with her, you cannot speak lightly of her without also speaking lightly of me. I am not your wife as truly as she is."



## CHAPTER X.

### HAD SHE GONE MAD?

LAYTON really believed that Zina had gone mad, talking in that sort of way like a second-rate actress who is miserably aware of her own failure to move the feelings of her auditors. Alarmed as he was at all that she had said—speaking with that dreadful effort, and her face wrung with woe—it had little or no effect upon his finer feelings.

“What does all this mean?” he asked, strung to another device and trying to speak sternly.

“It means that you did me the greatest wrong a man can do a woman.”

“You—my wedded wife?”

“You had no right to pretend to marry me; you were married already to that poor creature.”

Once more he had recourse to equivocation, but he saw that she did not believe him. It was impossible any longer to ignore the repulsion in her face, or the accusations which she made in that dull and toneless voice, with all the music gone out of it.



"If you were what they call a religious woman I should say you were a cold, hard Pharisee. It is the way with pretended Christians—they push a man out into the darkness—but *you*, you never made pretensions of that sort." And then finding that she looked as if she did not hear him, but made as though she were drawing figures on the gravel with her umbrella, which she never thought of putting up to protect her from the rain, he tried his former plan of assuming a tone of quiet authority.

"Listen to me," he urged, "you are tired and out of sorts and not accountable for what you are saying. These remarks may be sentimental and interesting, but you women want training in logic, and it seems to me they are not to the point. Tomorrow morning, when you have slept upon it, you will admit that they are overstrained. Come into the house and take some food like a reasonable being; it is dreadful to see you in this miserable plight."

He tried to take her hand, but she drew it from him; it was as cold as ice. "I am sorry you are unhappy too," she said as she drew it away; "but you have brought it on yourself, and you cannot be more wretchedly unhappy than I am."

"You are a strange woman; I know that once you loved me," he said as he bent over her and once more tried to assert his right of property in her.

The light in her eyes shot through him. It was the supreme crisis. His whole being was thrilled with agony, as the revelation that she was lost to him stabbed him to the heart. He tried to smile, but she heard the sound of his quickening breath and saw that the beads of perspiration were standing on his forehead.

"Do not dare to touch me—do not venture to



draw near to me," she cried beneath her breath, and the sob which forced itself from her seemed to be too much for the delicate framework of her body—it shook her as a reed is shaken by the wind. Then she walked of her own accord into the house—walked slowly and with a steadier step than usual. Her face was set, as if it had been carved out of stone, and he was terrified for the consequences when he caught sight of it, scarcely knowing which he most feared, a violent outbreak, or that forced calmness in her voice which was still more terrible.

He drew a deep sigh of relief when she appeared again in the evening, for he saw that she was making an effort to keep her nerves under control, and that she would act better in the emergency than he could have expected of her. Thank heaven, there would be no scene; he need not have dreaded it, for she said nothing of what had passed, but joined as usual in the conversation, not wincing when his eyes fell on her as she sat at the head of the table, and then sailed out with the other smiling ladies.

The *badinage*, the light jests, the graceful marshalling of her guests took him by surprise. He did not know that she heard their voices as if in a dream, and that when she accompanied them into the drawing-room she continued to see everything like the shifting scenes on a stage, or the visions of a trance. There was an expression in her face which held him spellbound as he saw her acquiescing in every arrangement, and heard her talking as usual on every subject—even on politics, which did not interest her in the least.

Once or twice she even made a random shot, and on another occasion he would have laughed back, "My dear, that is not like you, when you pride yourself on your exactitude." But now he was



quick to take her cue. And always scrupulously polite to his wife, and attentive to all that she said in company, he was, if anything, more polite than ever.

It might almost have seemed as if she had decided to anticipate gossip, and had determined that there should be a general consensus of opinion in his favour, so deferentially did she appeal to him that evening, and so anxious did she appear to convey the opinion that their marriage had been a success, running into one of the marked types of the marriage of like to like.

And George, who was one of the men used to popularity and accustomed to female adoration took the deference—to all appearances—pleasantly.

When the evening was over, she awoke as if from a trance, creeping into her own room as into a corner, like some wounded animal, to hide the shame for which she was not responsible, but which made her feel as guilty as if she had taken part in it.

Her sorrow included sorrow for all the women who had been mistaken, and who wished that they could have been duped again into that state of ignorant bliss in which they had at one time lived.

Was it possible it had never dawned upon George that their relationship had been hopelessly changed by the discovery, and that she must take refuge somewhere. The question was *where?*

She thought of the cowardly soldier who had been praised for his courage in not running away at the battle of Waterloo, and who had answered stolidly, "Where was we o run to?"

Rack her brains as she might, she could think of no one with whom she could take refuge, but Mary Carruthers—Mary who was now a widow, but logical and unselfish in the motherly recognition that the needs of the living were greater than those



of the dead. How Zina wished now that she had not sneered at the idea of the professor giving up his "will to live," and how she despised herself for having despised the poverty of Mary's home. Warmth and comfort were pleasant, but Zina had never been one of those who could long be satisfied with pleasures which were merely physical. Never had she shown her heart to the world and never did she mean to show it, but Mary would best protect her, and help her to hide it. Yet she wished to be a little calmer before she ran the risk of terrifying Mary.

But while she debated the question a tap as of light fingers came at the door, which she had locked, and Eva Capern's silvery voice cried—

"My dear, let me in, I have come to ask you to let me brush my hair in your room. I don't know how it is," she said, when she had seated herself, "but I felt that I could not sleep a wink to-night unless I had a good croon with you. I am anxious about *you*, and it is when we women get nervous about each other that we take to stimulants and morphia and all sorts of naughty habits. I fight against them for your sake. Since I entered your house, I positively have dropped using rouge, and am so moderate in alcohol that I have some idea of distinguishing myself as a teetotaler—there, don't blush—it is all your influence! I made up my mind to tell you so. No, I can assure you I am incapable of paying compliments; you should have found out that by this time."

Having wheedled her friend to this extent, Eva proceeded to pump her, brushing out her fair locks as she said tentatively. "You influence all of us—even your husband. But you must not be too hard on him—his ideas of life are the society ideas, and if you have found out anything you don't quite like about him, you may depend upon it he has been more sinned against than sinning. I said to myself



when I saw you to-night, 'she has found out something.' It is of no use to deny it—you were not yourself. You had dressed yourself up too magnificently—your eyes looked too weary to bear successfully the brilliance of all those shining jewels—and your diamonds *are* splendid. But you talked—really my dear, I believe for once you were conscious that you were not quite sincere and you are generally so hard on us others, but you were a little unlike yourself—You were gay with an unnatural gaiety which was forced, and sometimes relapsed into silence. I have always said to myself, 'Zina is not a woman to have her individuality swamped in her husband's, and if George Layton thinks he can succeed in effacing it he will rue his mistake.' But, my dear, you will have to do like the rest of us—manage the men without openly finding fault with them. I am sure you have nothing to complain of; you have everything which heart can desire, and I am sure that your poor father—"

Mrs. Capern was a clever woman, but she had overshot the mark. If Zina had overdone *her* part that evening, Eva too had betrayed herself—used as she was to plot and to tell fibs to secure her object. The hurried way in which she spoke, catching her breath, betrayed her fear that the convenient *pied-à-terre* in Mrs. Layton's beautiful house, more than ever useful in a life likely to be of a semi-nomadic stamp, might fail her.

Mrs. Capern prided herself on being good-hearted; she would not allow her conscience to reproach her for the part she had played in making up this match. She had meant no harm and had acted according to her lights; it was rather too strong for that conscience to turn round on her and twit her with trickery and worthlessness.

Still there was a look almost of panic on Eva's face as if she feared that whatever had happened



was beyond the little skilful attempts on which she prided herself in the way of patching up. She could learn nothing from the expression of the handsome *silhouette* sharply-cut against the becoming background of the room; if Zina's face had been called sphinxlike by those who admired it in the old days, it was more than sphinxlike now in its imperturbable immobility.

In the misery which had overwhelmed her Eva's chatter did not signify—nothing really signified. She was ceasing to believe in herself or in human nature generally. It was all rubbish about the possibilities of the race—and certainly she had altogether ceased to have illusions about the goodness of the other sex. So little did she resent the interference that Mrs. Capern added tentatively,

"You are no worse off than crowds of other women—men are all alike and women are fools who expect too much from them. My dear, he is a man, and no better than the rest of them."

Then Zina roused herself to stand on the defensive, and determined to protect herself from this impertinent curiosity, as well as from a pity which would have been intolerable. She had become apparently unconscious, and insensible to the fact that such things could be flaunted in her face, as she interrupted the stream of chatter by saying—

"If you allude to my father, please remember the honour due to his name," and then she added quite quietly, "you best know yourself what you mean by the other innuendo. When a man is as brilliant and successful as George he is sure to have detractors. I have never complained of anything and never mean to complain. When I *do* it will be time enough to give me your advice, but till then please remember that I take the sole responsibility on myself for anything which goes wrong in this house."



“Really, my dear, it is too tantalising; you are one of the people to whom it is difficult to say things straight out, and I cannot undertake always to put them into unexceptionable language.”



## CHAPTER XL

### TAKING REFUGE.

IT was some comfort to Zina to find herself alone, and to reflect that the interfering visit had so far been fortunate that when Eva left her piqued and offended, she could at least remember that she had heard *her*—the wife—exonerate George, so that when the time came for gossip he would be saved from some of the drops which might have made his cup more bitter. Eva determined to make her own position good with Mr. Layton, by quoting Zina, whose present mood was for self-sacrifice, and for utter indifference to the opinion of the world. She had no pity left for the “fool,” whose anxiety for action was so intense that it left her no time to reflect on the mortification inflicted on herself, no time to bewail the desolation of her life; the warning signs written in flaming letters as by the moving hand in Belshazzar’s vision seeming to be inscribed on every wall of the house.

It was as if in a few hours a gulf had suddenly



opened, yawning, between Zina and everything which had seemed natural before. In the boudoir which communicated with her dressing-room, she could no longer touch her music, which lay open on the piano, though she had been taking a lesson in singing but the day before from a master who came from London, as George wished her to learn from notes. She had begun a business-letter which lay open on the little inlaid *escritoire*, but tried in vain to remember what it was about, tearing it in pieces and throwing them away from her.

The very papers and curtains seemed to palpitate with the thoughts which had taken possession of her in that house, and the remembrances of that last six months.

Her wandering eyes noted once more the beautiful furniture and the collection of curios, with perceptions which seemed to have been acutely developed, and a certain deplorable atrophy of her natural feelings. If her lot had seemed like misery, directly she discovered its true meaning, she said to herself it had been "gilded misery," and that it was time she determined no longer to wear such gilded chains. And then she began to reproach herself for building her faith so firmly on the sand. Had she been a creature without a will, without a sense of right, that she had allowed herself to be led so quietly and unresistingly into a fool's paradise? And next her ideas lapsed into confusion, and it was some time before she could recover her power of continuous thought.

Yet she had to write, and tried to do so, looking in a weary, non-comprehending way at the words she was writing. Did it much matter however stupid her wording might be? Could she ever hope to make George Layton understand that in this case the obstacle was no small one which could be knocked out of the way?



Every sound had ceased in the house, and there was only the note of a night-jar among the trees as she began to put together the jewels her father had given her; they made but a small package when her other ornaments and costly dresses were left behind her. The thought of this did not trouble her. "Why should the word poverty be a synonym for calamity? Man is in the world to work for others, not for himself, and I shall have two children to work for now. After all, it will suit me better than leading the life I have been leading lately—a parasitic existence like that endured by certain of the ants nourished by their slaves," she thought, trying to comfort herself by far-fetched ideas as she dressed herself in her plainest dress and crept out into the garden on her way to the lonely cottage just as the sun was rising with tints of daffodil, rose, and purple glory—touches of the enchanter's wand which she did not even look at.

After all, it was not her own dignity, her own sentiment or wounded feeling on which she was acting now, but her larger sense of right and wrong, of equity and justice. She knew that she could not act otherwise, and yet it was no accident, but steady deliberation which made her turn her eyes from the sky that she might not endure the heart-break of the unanswered question to which the silence could not respond — the question which had been asked from generation to generation.

If she could have believed in any Infinite Good, or Infinite Love to sympathise with these unsatisfied yearnings, she knew that her ordeal would have been less severe.

George Layton, who was accustomed to sleep late, also rose somewhat earlier than usual that morning. He had been taken by surprise by his wife's bearing on the previous evening, and could not



understand her changed mood. He would have liked it almost better if she had shewn *something* of what she had been suffering and rather feared the results of her forced attempt to hide it so completely, though he had judged it better not to intrude upon her after they separated in the drawing-room.

He tried to hide his own uneasiness even from himself when he found that the bed had not been slept upon, and that a letter directed in a shaky handwriting—scarcely like his wife's—had been pinned to the dressing-table. When he read it, he was still determined to make the best of it, and his pride helped him in trying to shut his eyes to the horror of the discovery that Zina had actually left him, and the numerous other unpleasant things which must sooner or later follow on the heels of that discovery.

“Women have their tiffs and get out of them. I shall say that she was not well, and that I had given her leave to go on a visit to some friends—quietly in the country—without bothering herself with leave-taking”, he said to himself, feeling somewhat sick of the Japanese curiosities grinning at him from the walls and screens, and of all the articles of *vertu* with which he had furnished those rooms.

Ye gods! it was more than he could believe at first! He, of all men, as he reflected indignantly, ought to have been protected from such a catastrophe. He had married a wife who was no “bread-and-butter miss,” but who was familiar with the classical literature of ancient Greece and Rome, and conversant from her own acknowledgment with the worst forms of evil in the world. Women of such cultivated intellect were reported to be cold; at any rate they had their own resources, and he had never interfered with his wife in her intellectual debauches. Her fancies were artistic, her



desires, he had supposed, would be easily satisfied; he had at least drawn large cheques to satisfy them. She had had her musical orgies, and her den in which she could mess with paints to her heart's delight. He had supposed she was the last woman to go off at a tangent like this. But now, if she chose to give him his liberty, should he not also have *his* freedom? He had never pretended to be more than human.

A few hours afterwards a lady thickly veiled, wearing a long cloak which hid her figure, took her place in the railway carriage, amongst the third-class passengers, for London. She had already called at the cottage and left enough money to defray the expenses of a simple funeral. It was easy to do this from the ample allowance which George Layton had always made his wife. Some of the "pin-money" had accumulated, as she had found it difficult to spend the whole on fripperies.

"You must bring me the little one," she said encouragingly to Daisy, "as soon as I am able to give you my new address, and I will find a careful nurse for her. I am going away for a little time, and one of the arrangements I want to make is about your schooling." And though the poor girl burst into grateful tears, it was impossible for her to realise that any sacrifice would be involved, or that she and her dead sister had been selfish in any way in inflicting their troubles upon another who proved so ready to share them.

The beautiful Mrs. Layton seemed so far away from her or from her world that she could only vaguely wonder why she had dressed herself so plainly, or why it was that her face looked so white and drawn in the early morning light.

"Do not weep for your sister, she is better off," Zina heard her own voice repeating, as if it were a truism utterly meaningless to her.



And then feeling like the ghost of herself, or a miserable atom whirled about in the shuttle of destiny, she set out for the great city—her main object being to live *perdue*—at least for a time. She remembered having heard that people who wished to efface themselves without leaving a trace of their whereabouts—so that detection could be baffled in their pursuit, and not a clue be discoverable—could do so best in London, especially at the East End. It was but a short time before that she had made herself merry at the absurdity of folks who had the unpleasant habit of disappearing in this way from their relatives, leaving the world by way of a freak, and returning again when tired of the somewhat pointless joke. She was vexed with herself for seeming to imitate such maniacs, as she bent her own steps to the crowded East, knowing that it would be foolish to attempt to dispose of her jewellery in the pawnbrokers' shops, which were filled with refuse—the battered and broken drift-wood which the tide of human life was leaving festering behind it—but being thankful that she had still sufficient money for her immediate wants.

Yet the place which she had chosen only made her sadder; she had forgotten that it is our own moods which make or mar everything for us. Had Zina visited it as a philanthropist her experience would have been different. But her heart was just now filled with an unconscious longing after the simpler life of the people—a life belonging to an earlier civilisation when the rules which guided conduct were less complex and less minute. She was sick of that personal casuistry which each mind must think out separately for itself, sick of over-luxury, sick of pampered indulgence. And she was doomed to fresh disappointment.

Afterwards she acknowledged that she was in that sort of mental *malaise* in which her thoughts



had no time to settle to anything, in which she still seemed to be counting the breaths of that dying woman. Even her own sense of personal injury made her somehow feel base and weak. And she had chosen the worst spot in which to seek forgetfulness, unless indeed it were such forgetfulness as could only result in the extinction of Self, or triumph in the pessimism which revolted against the selfishness of prolonging human existence.

"It is only for a few days—only to get a breathing space, while I have time to write to Mary, and then I will be brave, for why should I hide from him? He cannot compel me to go back; he will not do it for his own sake," she said to herself, comparing her own lot favourably with that of tens of thousands of working women—her suffering sisters in the great metropolis, of whose terrible struggles and temptations amidst pestilential moral and physical surroundings, she told herself she had thought too little in the days of her luxury and ease.

She was haunted long afterwards by the look on some of those other women's faces—a look which her own trouble perhaps caused her to exaggerate—a look sick with misery and yet making her ashamed of attaching too much importance to her own grief. When she wandered out for a lonely ramble the sight of one of the bridges with sluggish water beneath had a strange effect on her distempered imagination. As an artist she admired the putrescent tints; as a woman she thought of the ghastly procession of ruined women recruited from the ranks of the weak and the betrayed who had tried to drown their misfortunes in the foul depths which had lured them. She could fancy it all—the shrill scream followed by a splash and then the despairing upturned face. She drew a deep breath and hastened on. Was there any sister whom she could help, or any sister who could help *her* amongst



this mass of human beings—so near to each other in body and so widely separated in spirit that none knew of the sufferings of another? Was this part of London with its constant influx of foreigners worse than other great cities? Was there more bodily destitution, more physical misery than in other parts of the world? And then to her distempered fancy it seemed that the world itself was seething with moral decay like the world before the flood.

She was ill and out of sorts as she had been once before in youth and not answerable for her perverted fancies.

“Why should I expect to be so much better off than they are, and even now I know little of the cold and desolate rooms, the aching bodies, the continual craving for food, the unloved, miserable lives, and the desperate battle to exist, which goes on from morning to night with so many of them,” she thought as she wrote to Mary, and asked if that kind-hearted friend could take her in to be once more a “working woman”, toiling at her painting not only for her own daily bread, but for the daily bread of a little child whom she had promised to support.

She said nothing of the young girl—Daisy—who would also have to be fitted for earning her own living as a teacher, and who could, perhaps, be taken in as a pupil-teacher at some school. The knowledge that Mary Carruthers knew more about the practical difficulty of these things than she did, and would think her quite beside herself, prompted her to keep back all mention of Daisy. Neither did she tell Mary any of the circumstances which had led to her leaving her home. Her first impulse, which was to consult somebody, had to be fought against, for she was perfectly convinced, after sleeping upon it, that none of the “wise saws and modern instances” could



help in her case. Mary herself had passed through much suffering lately, and as Zina, frenzied and agonised, felt as if she could bear no more, she attempted to steel herself by drawing out Mary's last pathetic letter, and reminding herself that one so gentle and tender as her friend had emerged through an ordeal uncomplainingly.

Zina had never sympathised with Mary in her devotion to the Professor, but she had felt deeply for her poor friend when about a year before, near the time of her own marriage, Mary had written to tell her of the shock she had received in the sudden death of her dearly-loved James. Dr. Carruthers had been found dead in his bed, and Zina with her vivid imagination had pictured to herself, after Mary's description, one more human being lying cold and stiff, obeying the voice of the stern Presence, while her gentle friend called in vain to the white face pillowed on her arm, in the darkness which could be felt, and which seemed to strike on her eyeballs—the thing which had to be covered with a sheet being all that was left to her of the husband she had worshipped.

Neither had Zina thought it wonderful that the letters which followed should be filled with James's praises—always the case when a man is dead. Mary seemed to have found out when her husband was gone that he had been the mainspring of the household, and did not see the humour of it when she naïvely wrote, "we never knew it till we missed him."

But now nearly a year had gone by, and the ranks had closed up as usual. And though the widow had declined to visit Zina, she had moved from her cottage in the country, which she seemed to look upon as a place of the tombs, filled with memories of the past, and wrote that the unspeakable value of every moment of time had been taught



to her by the nearness of death. She held her children so dear that she refused to leave them at all, but she seemed to prosper more than she had done before in London. An old uncle had died and left her a sum of money which, with her limited ideas, seemed to her considerable.

The professor had always been her most expensive child, it had ever been hardest to minister to his tastes. And now when her two boys had been taken off her hands—the one by a successful tea-planter in Ceylon, and the other admitted as a “Middy” in a training-ship—there was no longer any stint in Mary’s household.

She had enough, as she said, to share with outsiders, for she still continued to make extra money, faithfully going the round of the treadmill.



## CHAPTER XII.

### ONE OF THE WORKING WOMEN.

MARY'S sympathies were as ready as ever, when after a few days spent in vainly trying unaided to collect her old energies, Zina came to her one evening from the East, arriving at the well-known retreat in Great Coram-street, where old associations which she would gladly have dismissed for ever were recalled by every sight and sound. The little girls had gone to bed, but Mary had been expecting Zina and opened her arms at the first rustle of her dress, and the first sound of her step on the uncarpeted stairs.

"Come to me, my dear! Come in and shut the door, and warm yourself by the fire. I kept it up till you came. I knew you would come—some instinct told me it would be to-night," she said, gazing with consternation at the pale and almost inanimate form, which moved as if stiffened in every limb, with livid violet round the eyes, the deep circles evidently riven by agony. "You look as if



the life had gone out of you. Why I do believe you must have walked—it is raining—and you are wet.”

“Do you suppose I care for the rain?” Zina cried for the first time passionately, forgetting her resolutions. “Let it wet me through and through—do you think I should care?”

“But, my dear, you will get your death,” remonstrated the other woman with motherly common-sense.

“Do you not know that there are some things a thousand times worse than *death*? Dear, it is you who are the child and *I* who have aged,” Zina cried. Her cheeks were no longer white. There was a hot current within her veins, and she was no longer inanimate, but painfully conscious of all the agony she was repressing, as Mary queried in a low, shocked voice—

“What does it mean, dear? I hope there is nothing wrong between you and your husband?”

“Don’t ask me to tell you the truth,” she answered almost irritably. “It means that it is all over—all that was worth having in life. As the French say, *Rien n’est si triste que la vérité*. It is enough that I have left him.”

“*Left him*? Do you mean to make me believe you have left your husband? Why I should have said you were the last woman to be mixed up in a scandal of that sort!”

“Perhaps I left him to avoid a scandal,” answered Zina in that curious lifeless voice which had been hers ever since she had tried to reason with George.

She had made up her mind to confide in no one. No one could act as her confidante, as she told Mary—Mary, who in her white innocence surrounded by her little ones, knew nothing of impure lives or disordered wills; nothing of sin, digging its serpent fangs into the tainted flesh, or of the



transmission from father to son of some sinister tendency—surely Mary would be the last woman to make anything of a story like hers!

“Life seems a little impossible sometimes,” she only said with the wan smile which went to Mary’s heart; “but I do not know that it would make it any easier if I were to confide in *you*—or anyone.”

She begged not to be questioned further, hoping in her secret heart to be saved from commonplace talk and also from the reflections which might be cast upon her husband. And Mary, who knew that there was no use in interfering between husband and wife, kept her qualms to herself, and contented herself with petting and comforting the vagrant. The kind woman’s surmises were numerous, but all of them were dismissed as soon as she entertained them. Zina had neither a sarcastic tongue nor a petulant temper, and was not likely to quarrel; nor was she of a jealous disposition, her nature being too high to admit suspicion. As to gossip, she was not at all likely to be misled by it. It was easy for a woman who had any wits about her to sift untruthful gossip and deprive it of its sting. Any unkind hints of that sort would only be wasted on Zina; she would treat them as they deserved.

Yet *what* could have happened that one so generous and truthful should turn from her day after day, with a despairing cry, “Forgive me for coming to you; I felt I *must* come to you if you would take me in; for I was so lonely, and—I felt as if I might do something terrible, if left to myself.”

“Hush, hush!” said Mrs. Carruthers soothingly, “do not talk so wildly. James would have said you were quite right not to tell me too much.”

She was always fond of quoting James and making him out to have been a paragon of wisdom, and just now it gave Zina a horrible inclination to



laugh hysterically. For in her secret heart she could not help knowing that had James been living it would have been almost impossible for his wife to brave his peevish discontent at her thus opening her doors as well as her heart to a vagrant.

She envied Mary her belief in the cœrulean skies in which the apathetic and somewhat selfish James was supposed to have taken refuge, but could not help knowing that he would have coldly and sternly disapproved of her admission into his earthly domicile, had he been living still. Well, belief was always difficult! But Zina was fair enough to acknowledge to herself that there was nothing in the Christian faith really inconsistent with progress after death. Every analogy in life was in favour of that progress, and she had a vague idea that there was something in the Book about those who entered into life maimed and blind. James was either dead altogether, or perhaps he understood things a little better now, yet once or twice Mary was faintly aware that for the children's sakes—especially the sake of her little girls—there was a feeling of uneasiness in her own large heart lest she should be mixing herself up with matters which might bring discredit on them.

Zina had hinted at something of the sort. Yet as she sometimes sat rocking herself backwards and forwards, with her big eyes fixed on vacancy—the irises large and splendid, but the pupils unnaturally contracted—there were times when Mary feared from the gaze of those scared eyes continually fixed on the past, that the mind of this poor friend, who shut her grief so determinedly within her own breast, might give way.

One night when she caught her sitting in such fashion, crying beneath her breath, "Oh the pain—the pain!" because she thought herself unobserved, the motherly Mary could endure it no longer, but catching her hands, exclaimed, "My dear, what is it?"



Zina looked up. All the lines of her face had hardened, the youthful curves were no longer there. To defend herself at George's expense seemed to her mean and cowardly.

She drew her hands away, and gazed with intentness at the faded wall-paper, which Mary had never thought of having renewed. "Well to confess the truth," she said, "we had a few words. Believe me, perfect love is not for this earth." The answer sounded unnatural, and Mary was hurt. "Is it your desire," she said a little more sternly "to make an irreparable breach before the world for the sake of a 'few words'? Think of what you are doing—you have the example to society to think of."

"Oh, society can take care of itself; it is bad enough already, and doesn't need *me* to set an example to it." Her estimate of society had always been low and had sunk still lower since her marriage to George Layton.

"Would it not have been better to avoid the open rupture?"

"No, it would not; none of us can be better for acting a lie."

"But people will think—it is *you* who will be despised—the world is always down on a fugitive wife—the world will be sure to lay the blame on the woman."

"I am quite prepared for it to do so."

"It is always a hard judge."

"I do not care for its judgment. Who cares about the contempt of the world? It is the shame of wrong-doing for which we should care," cried Zina losing her patience. She was shaken and unnerved, and there was a recklessness about her which frightened the other woman as she continued, "I will tell you this much; he was bound to another before he cared for me. It was a previous contract—it ought to have been if it were



not, and any previous contract renders the other void. That is why——”

She did not finish the sentence, but this idea was evidently the key to her action in the matter.

“That is a dangerous way of putting things. You mean that Mr. Layton——?”

“Hush,” Zina cried, “do not speak against him. I could not bear that. *I* am the one to be blamed; I have braved that public opinion which oils the wheels of society and acts like unseen law, setting the machinery in motion without friction. You are right to be properly shocked at me; none of the guests at my husband’s house would ever have braved it. And yet——” she broke off again as if to check impulsiveness and then said, as if speaking to herself, “It is a farce to be made to swear to love and obey a man when you don’t know how your opinions may change about him when you come to know him—swear to love too, as if certain things did not kill love, and as if love could be enforced by any oath.”

“That is another of your wild ideas.”

“I used to have many queer ideas—highly objectionable you would have called them, but I hoped they would take to themselves wings when I came to *you*. If I could begin my life over again, if I were only free! But I see now that when I was free I was simply egotistic, wrapped up in my own pursuits, and I trifled with the affections which neglected, have taken their revenge on me.”

“The woman’s constancy is generally so much greater than the man’s,” remarked Mary tentatively.

But her observation was not answered, and Zina continued silent as she added, “If he is self-indulgent, most men are *that*.” She took no notice of this other feeler. She had long ceased to be angry; no dwelling on her wrongs could make them less, but in this case it was not her own wrongs on which



she dwelt. Something worse had succeeded to her anger, the dull aching of a heart which knew that the corpse of a dead love could never be galvanized into life. If she sometimes rambled on in the perturbation of a mind ill at ease she was careful to keep the honour of her husband's name intact. And by degrees Mary became used to her disconnected talk and let it flow on as some relief for the overwrought feelings, though her feverish talkativeness, so unlike her usual quiet and restrained self, and the way in which she listened with trepidation for every footstep, shewed that the strain had been too much for her and the reaction had come at last. It was painful to see her young form bending nearly double under the weight of her grief, fighting it out so that no one else could help her, too wretched to trouble herself about appearances—collapsed and exhausted. It was like the end of all things, a stupefaction—a desolation in which nothing was left.

How to shake her out of it was poor Mary's puzzle.

First she tried her old plan of chattering about her books.

"When I flatter myself I have got any new idea somebody else is sure to have got it before me. I feel like Daudet's poet when I sit down to write as if I must give it up because somebody else has stolen all my best thoughts. Dame Nature is very cruel; she sets a lot of her pupils the same tasks at the same moment, humbugging them by whispering separately into the ears of each of them that he or she is the only one to whom she entrusts one of her best 'tips', and when the poor fools are taken in—because ideas belong to none of them, but are in the air—they begin to squabble with each other and accuse each other of plagiarism."

But Zina did not hear her.

And Mary had to change her system. She no



longer pretended to rattle on in self-mockery about her own affairs, but put her arms round her friend and soothed her, stroking her hair as she would have stroked that of a tired child. For Mary had the power without preaching of being able to tranquillise, though the differences between the two women, of which Stuart Newbolt had been aware years before, had never been more emphasized than they were at present. It worried the exact and orthodox Mary that Zina should care so little for her good name; all her tenderness was needed not to show that it shocked her.

"You are a mesmerist," murmured Zina; "you can bring people back to health with a touch of your gentle hand. I do not believe in diabolic agency, but if I did I should think that all illness was a part of the devil's work, and people who are more or less angelic like you can drive away the devil. But that is the hard part of it. The martyrs could go through tortures with their firm belief in golden cities and great white thrones, but I have no such hopes to sustain me, I—"

At last she was asleep. Evidently she had been light-headed, not knowing what she said, and Mrs. Carruthers, who watched over her for some hours of that night, heard her start from her dreams crying. "Oh, then, it was not true!" and address some woman of the name of Agnes, telling her to rest tranquilly—she would keep her promise.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### WAS IT A DREAM?

THE next morning Mary found Zina fully dressed at an early hour, her hands clasped round her knees and staring vaguely out of the window.

"What nonsense did I talk last night," she asked anxiously. "Forget it. Oh, try and forget if I said anything about things which I ought to have kept a secret. I could never have talked to you in that foolish way if I had not felt sure you would make allowance for my folly; you are not the sort of woman to put it down in your mind." She was still wild-eyed and pallid, with a tingling feeling in her veins, shrinking from the spring sun which was shining into the room, as if she wished to hide herself rather than it should creep nearer to her.

"I was the right person for you to come to if you were going to be ill," answered Mrs. Carruthers, parrying her question.

"But I am not going to be ill. I have too much work to do—two children to look after," was the



answer which astonished Mary. "I brought my paints with me. I must set to work at once."

And she forced herself to the task, though the occupation for which she had cared so much proved to be distasteful to her. The painting which she had loved could not bring more than temporary relief, the beautiful scenes in which she had once delighted had all become vague to her. They were inconsistent with the stupor which meant rebellion against fate. Her very exhaustion, bodily and mental, had become a sort of luxury—she abandoned herself to it, and work was inconsistent with it. After an effort to paint she awoke again to all her old misery; the attempt to depict beauty only aggravating her consciousness of the ugliness of evil. She had been wounded so deeply that she felt as if she could never recover her old trustful nature; she was haunted by the wickedness of the world; a constant sense of it nauseated her. The taint which she would not admit to be the "trail of the serpent" was all the worse if it originated in the brute-like, ape-like nature of man—a brutishness which interminable centuries of culture had been powerless to root out. She seemed to have a part in it, reminding herself that she too, for a doubtful good, had been ready to "play with hollow nuts for a stake of hollow nuts," and asking herself what spell could have dulled her maidenly instincts and caused her to fall a victim to George Layton's plausible language? Of all this she was not even tempted to speak. It seemed to her that,

"Better than such discourse did silence long,  
Long barren silence square with her desire."

"It is all too hateful; I only want to forget it," was all that she acknowledged to Mrs. Carruthers, who had to be content with guesses.

For after all, as she said to herself, how could



Mary comfort her? She might mesmerize her by her gentle touch, but their ways of thinking were so different. Mary, who cherished the mild conviction that obedience with unreasoning admiration was a married woman's duty! Mary with her gracious sweetness and her gentle way of ignoring the harder facts of life whenever they were unpleasant to her! As well might she emulate the confiding shop-girls who consulted the motherly woman concerning their 'Arries and their illusions!' No, the thought of Mary's kindness and unflagging selfishness was a stimulating thought, but she could never brace her courage so as to confront that gentle soul with her more cruel knowledge, and more subtle ideas respecting a difficulty such as hers.

"Try to cry; cry and you will feel better," that kind-hearted woman had said to her more than once, as the days passed on—the feverish hard-working days, in the intervals of which Zina was not tempted to shed tears. "It was not her way," as she explained to Mary as she still sat staring in front of her, her eyes large and wide-opened with a sort of fear in them which was terrible to witness, adding that "she supposed something had gone wrong in the making of her." It was indeed as if the ingredients, as she further explained, had "not been properly mixed."

For she was certainly, according to Mary's judgment, too susceptible in some points, and too callous in others.

"If you intend to exhibit under your own name, and sell your pictures under that name, he will find you out; and then—you cannot try for a separation unless you have proper grounds," said Mrs. Carruthers a little nervously one day.

She was startled when Zina answered, "I never thought of trying for it. It is the ease with which people try for separations which weakens the marriage tie; but *we* were never properly married.



I shall exhibit under my maiden name." And then she set to work again, as if she had said something which was quite trivial, determining not to let her feelings of discontent and misery master her.

So the months went on till the days were beginning to be warm, and Zina—used to a luxurious life—was feeling oppressed by the heat, and yet fought against the conviction that her bodily discomfort must exercise an injurious influence over the creations of her mind. She was ashamed of her languor and exhaustion, ashamed of the sudden impulse which impelled her to cry out, "How can I bear my life? Will it always go on like this?" controlling her gestures of despair.

"You are not your sensible self," said Mary, fearing that she was laying up fresh troubles for the future.

"Oh, do not talk in that way. It's of no use trying to be sensible. I can only do the best I can to patch up my broken life," was Zina's answer.

And then she astonished Mary more by insisting on sending for the baby, whose claims on her it was difficult to explain. "I am growing proud and unloving; I who have nothing to give but love, for I have lost all my big ideas, I have no power left. I cannot even paint," was the only explanation she vouchsafed to her mystified friend.

How could Mary guess that the swelling of the heart, the woman's yearning, of which in these advanced days so many women are beginning to be ashamed, for baby fingers to clasp her neck, and some tender and innocent creature to be entirely dependent upon her, was smouldering beneath her other agitations? Mrs. Carruthers was very human and free from pretences of being what she was not; but it was putting her unconventionality a little too much to the test to insist on foisting an infant on her respectable establishment for whose parentage no one was able to account.



"I cannot help it if you disapprove," said Zina as she gathered the child in her arms. "The kindest thing is silence, or I would tell you all about it."

And Mary did not press her. Both women shared the same abhorrence, and were unwilling to stir up the mud of this world's defilement. But as soon as the little one made its appearance, and from the time when she succeeded, almost beyond her hopes, in placing Daisy as a pupil-teacher in a school where she would be well trained, Zina began to take greater interest in her work.

A life of emotion which cannot be connected with action must sooner or later become a life of disease, but when we fully accept the theory that self-sacrifice is the true law of life, and that only by pain and struggle is progress made, the defect in our insufficient nature which debars us from understanding the lavish overflow of the Divine love, is more or less removed. Zina's cares were increased, but her morbid feelings were decreased. It was as if an easeful feeling for which she could not account had taken her for a time out of herself.

"Am I drunk with sorrow? It seems to me  
That my pain is less than it used to be;  
My pain and I have grown such friends,  
And our converse has sunk to a monotone."

she repeated to herself one night as she laid her weary head on the pillow, and then she added with a sort of smile, which touched her lips and was completed in her eyes, as she looked at the helpless little creature in the cradle by her side—

"I put pain behind me, and lie so still,  
I might almost be dreaming of good,  
But dreams presuppose some symptoms of will."

She fell asleep with the words on her lips, and wondered afterwards if the quotation could possibly have suggested the dream which followed. It was



less a dream than a vision. No vocal prayer had been hers; it was long since she had believed sufficiently to try to speak to God. And yet it was as if the very silence had become vocal, and a still small voice were speaking to her though she could not tell what it said. She had attempted, as many have done, to give more or less of her life to an elaboration of the vision of the beautiful which was always haunting her, but now for the first time it was hers to be haunted in a trance in which she was merely passive, and yet became as "a mad blind man" who sees.

Her mind had not been dwelling lately on sacred pictures. George Layton's ill-repressed scorn for the oft-repeated studies of virgins and children, and his objection to having copies from the old masters hanging upon his walls, had influenced her, though she would scarcely have admitted it, to such an extent that she had only occupied herself lately with small *genre* paintings. The more extraordinary did it afterwards seem that the face which appeared to her should have been one with signs of blood from the crown of thorns on its brows, with the pleading eyes sunk in caverns as though the source of tears were dried up in them. The pallid lips seemed to tell of unutterable yearning, and the garments hung in stiff folds round the emaciated shoulders.

She woke. Had she been haunted by some of the pictures she had seen? Her memory ran through all of them, from the earlier pre-Raphaelite painters to Carlo Dolci's *Ecce Homo*, or in modern times—Holman Hunt's mystical paintings. If her memory had retained any of these it had strangely altered them, yet what could it be but the creation of her own bewildered brain? She rose and dressed herself hastily, going up into the small room at the top of the house, lit by a skylight, which Mary had



allotted to her as a studio. For it was the *expression* of the face from which she could not escape. It seemed to follow her everywhere with its purity, and its pleading, till the determination to put the enigma to the test was upon her—and the longing to paint was beginning to torment her as with the pain of hunger.

She got out of bed, and paced about the room trying to control herself, and mentally reviewing all that had passed during the last few days, and her repeatedly expressed determination to work for bread for herself and the two children—only painting ordinary subjects.

“The pot-boilers are good enough to serve their purpose, though of course no one pretends they are high efforts, and I am a little ashamed of adding another to the numerous people who let Art down” she had said more than once. Even now she repeated to herself the formula that little everyday sketches were the pictures to *sell*, and that she would never undertake any others.

“They are my style of work,” she had said a day or two before to Mary, “just as yours, dear, is writing for the ‘Family Sympathiser’. Why should either of us mind if we are obliged to earn money?”

That seemed to be common-sense, and so was a conversation which came back to her from the past—a talk of certain artists at her father’s house, who had discussed the possibility of painting modern pictures at this more ambitious level.

“It depends upon how you conceive your subject—whether you paint with the Strauss-Renan idea, or whether you try to enter, as some of our modern Pre-Raphaelites have tried, into the illimitable mystery which pervades the religion of the East,” she remembered that one of these artists had said, and how another had answered “I can only render it as it seems possible to *me*,” with the quick retort from the other, “And *you* have combated all the



ecclesiastical traditions—you have changed them for such watchwords as natural selection, evolution or negation."

Stuart Newbolt had stood by smiling his smile of polite, scarcely interested attention and it had never occurred to his daughter in her wildest dreams that she, of all other people in the world, who prided herself on having been educated in that freedom of thought which is only reached after severe struggles—the struggles of generations—should attempt a theme which even these artists could speak of as hackneyed, or almost impossible to treat with any sort of originality. But the real fact was she did not mean to attempt it; it had come upon her, and was taking possession of her. She was not conscious of any idea which could have been leading up to it, for had she not abruptly stopped poor Mary when that kind friend had tried to hint at any sort of religious comfort?

She struggled now and fought against the feelings which overwhelmed her. Surely this was nonsense! But how strange!

She could no longer be guided by the opinions of artists, who were inclined to dissect everything in a materialistic and mechanical age.—She seemed to be obliged to obey the command of a power which compelled her when, hastily dressing herself, she began to sketch in an outline, and x the colours on her palette.

Ah, how would *it* be possible for the dead canvas to interpret the reality which haunted her and seemed to permeate her whole being? Never had she a greater conviction of her own incapacity. She trembled with excitement; her hand shook so that at first she could not steady it, but once more the tenacious will asserted itself.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE PICTURE.

MARY found her an hour afterwards, so occupied that she did not hear her enter the room. She had apparently forgotten her necessary breakfast, and had to be coaxed to take it by letting one of the children bring it up and put it on a chair by her side. There was an amount of vital energy still about the artist, who might have been excused for considering herself an invalid, which astonished Mrs. Carruthers, who did not know that she was endeavouring to fix a fugitive intangible vision.

Mary was alarmed. It was evident to her that her friend's nerves were excited to an extraordinary degree. She herself had advised her to do whatever work she had to do in her own way. "That way lies success if success is to come to you—don't listen to critics," she had added from her own experience. But to the practical matter-of-fact woman this inveterate pursuit of some new idea seemed an obstinacy which was almost morbid.



"What are you painting?" she ventured to ask when she came up again to remind Zina of the hour for luncheon, hoping for a little conversation, and she was naturally a good deal astonished when Zina answered less cordially than usual, and then tried to explain with a muttered apology, "I hate being questioned about a subject when I hardly know myself."

"Why do you not sit down to it? You must be tired of standing."

And again Zina put her off with a smile which was enigmatical. "What would be the use of telling her that I am painting an optical delusion?" she said to herself with a shrug of the shoulders.

What would have been the use of telling anyone that in her new intentness and a sort of humility which she could not comprehend, she felt as if she could do better standing before the easel, and for the first time could comprehend the stories of Fra Angelico, who was said to have painted on his knees? But Fra Angelico no doubt believed in the occult, and she, as she repeated to herself, was no such fool; she was only painting an optical delusion! And yet this thing was real to her as nothing had been for days and weeks, and as she painted it her thoughts were ravished and lifted up, as it were against her will, and her memory was verse-haunted.

"And the ear of man cannot hear, and the eye of man cannot see; But if he could see and hear this Vision—were it not *He*?"

The words ran on, ringing their refrain on her brain, and she tried in vain to get rid of them, as she tried equally in vain to forget the sounds which she thought she had heard in her dream: "These are the wounds of my passion wherewith I am still wounded in the House of my Friends." If it were so, then she had a full explanation of the awful consequences of sin, for if a Divine being were still really existent, wounded continually in the persons



of all His creatures great and small, and if the temple of their body could possibly be the house wherein a Divine guest were suffering—then indeed there would be a new solution to the social problems which had tormented her. She did not accept the solution, and yet as she painted on, it became apparent to her that her picture would preach as no sermon could have done.

And the world with its anxious struggles, its heart-burnings, its sorrows, and even its sins, was forgotten for a time—all her own miserable little private history seemed to be put on one side. Everything personal and small seemed to be swallowed up; she was inspired with her lofty conception.

The idea grew upon her day after day that it must have been something objective and not in her own mind which she was labouring so wildly to depict—not a figment of her imagination, not a thing she could have invented. She had an inward conviction that a mere woman like herself could never even have thought of it. And oh, that avowal of infirmity, when her want of technical skill stood hopelessly in her way, and she felt unable to remove the veil which transposed for the minute between herself and her vision! She had a fair light in the old wainscoted room which Mary had lent to her for her work, but it was not good enough for a studio, and not only were there efforts of nervous anxiety in the attempt to go back to the moment when she had actually seen that which she wished to fix on canvas, but other moments as intense when the fever of expectation would bring out drops of perspiration on her brow.

For she had not overrated the difficulties. The difficulties were real, too great at times for her to conquer, in spite of the something which filled her eyes, and her mind, and for which her heart laboured panting in its longing after expression.



Never would she have confessed to any human being that there were hours, before that picture was finished, when she had felt as if a thrill were passing through her hair, such as that of which the old prophets had spoken in a Book she did not often read. Hours also when she felt for the time as if she had the power to render the Face—a power beyond herself, though she did not know whence it came or when that power might forsake her. But in those hours it was as if another hand guided hers, and the figure which she had conceived with the burning desire to paint it, and the dread of being defeated (with a horror of defeat which made her almost crazy) grew steadily before her eyes—not pretentious or ridiculous, still less mediocre or hackneyed, but that which had been given to her in an exalted moment when the majority of people would have called her mad.

Her eyes often smarted and were tired with her work, but she covered them with her hands for a few moments and then went on—dreading nothing so much as the suspension of her mental faculties—lest she should lose the recollection—oh—how she felt as if she would give anything not to lose it, but to be able to follow it and keep hold of it through the mazes of her brain, lest it should be driven out by other extirpating thoughts. There was nothing she feared so much as imitation of other artists.

To imitate nobody, not one of the sacred painters—to get them all out of her head and paint only *this*!

For the first time it seemed to her that she was putting her whole life into her work. But she did not even ask herself if she meant to exhibit the picture as she worked on with trembling hands, the inexorable power of art upon her. Angels and even Madonnas might be the creations of men,



but this was real—*real*, as she told herself with bated breath; whatever it meant it was real; “it had been given to her.” Adverse comments might be made if she ventured to exhibit it; they would not even affect *her*, as she repeated to herself. But they might make her feel a hypocrite. For was it not true that this was—no longer the copying of an inward idea—but a revelation which had been made to her, the credit of which she could not claim?

Nevertheless her delight was once more in her Art.

And again the little white hand looked graceful holding the sheaf of brushes, and the upright figure had a new spring in it as it bent lightly forward, more often standing than sitting at the easel.

From this time everything seemed to be changed for her. She no longer cried out that she could not live and bear it. The annoying wrangles about trifles which fall to the lot of many a lonely woman who has to fight her way in the world, and the uncomfortable letters or interviews which sometimes passed respecting the admission or hanging of her other and smaller pictures in one or other of the exhibitions, did not have power to disturb her. And the physical fatigue, which had followed upon the strain which her mental unhappiness had put upon every faculty, seemed to have passed away. It was as if she moved in a new atmosphere in which the undesirable disgust at all things, and the recoil from the dingy surroundings in Mary's lodgings in smoke-dried London, no longer worried her. She no longer turned against the untempting beverage which Mrs. Carruthers dignified by the name of tea when she poured it out for her noisy children from the ugly britannia-metal teapot, and could even afford to smile when that kind woman said encour-



agingly, "I feel sure you will not fail, though you have been so Quixotic as to take the burden of two other lives upon you; a strong dose of poverty is rather serviceable than otherwise to a young woman gifted like you, dear."

For Mary's words were so far true that the old days seemed to come back when Zina had been able to bear any privations for art's sake, and when work for the love of work had been its own reward. If the remembrance of that dream was fading away from her, it yet seemed to give force and momentum to her life. The new idea that there might be eyes watching her of which her fellow-creatures did not know was making her more or less indifferent to the strictures which would be sure to come to her.

She had not heard from Mr. Layton; it seemed as if he would take her at her word. But she was no longer cowardly about him and could have smiled to herself if she had heard the comments which were made on two of her pictures when they were favourably spoken of by the critics at one of the next exhibitions. "Don't repeat the scandals about her. She is an artist, she has genius; it is allowed to women of that sort to lead an exceptional existence."

And the world which can often afford to be kind, because it is never hard up for a new scandal, made its benevolent excuses for her—partly because she was erratic—while George Layton escaped the least shadow of blame.



## CHAPTER XV.

### THE RETURN OF AN OLD FRIEND.

ZINA'S other pictures sold speedily, and for a time she was scarcely able to execute the orders which came to her for more. Probably the curiosity which existed about a lady of whom varying stories were told, and who insisted on exhibiting by her maiden name, may have had something to do with the desire which a few of the connoisseurs expressed to have "a bit of her work." Nor was she ever hard up for subjects. Switzerland and Italy had supplied her with innumerable "bits," and her two or three next pictures added to her reputation. These were a picturesque well in a Swiss valley with a peasant boy supplying his horses with water; an Italian fruit-stall with women in full white sleeves and red handkerchiefs fastened cunningly over their heads; and "Haymaking on the mountains," in which two tired sunburnt labourers were reposing on the grass. It was universally admitted that Miss Newbolt had displayed all the deft-handedness of the





"FOR PITY'S SAKE, SAY NO MORE!"—*See Chapter XVII.*







French impressionist school in painting the foregrounds of spring flowers, white narcissi, golden ranunculi, pink polygonums, and feathery umbellifers, especially in that scene of the haymakers in Switzerland, and people were ready enough to buy up her other little recollections of Venice and its waterways, or Bignasco and its adjacent valleys.

But the critics differed about her; "a way they have," as Zina quietly observed. One said that her principal charm was in her subtle appreciation of character, while she needed to study colour, and another, that both handling and character could be improved, but that her principal attraction was as a colourist.

"As if anyone could define colour, or all the writing about it could do any good," said the artist laughing. "Its charm is as indescribable as the flavour of wine or the scent of a flower."

Meanwhile it became necessary for her to take a larger and more airy studio, and one was found for her in an adjacent street. It separated her from Mary, but it also separated her from minor worries. She could look back with a smile on that time of her life when she had been vexed with herself for finding the petty details of a family circle stupid, hollow and dull, and had allowed herself to be fretted by the little thoughts of the little minds, and the little jokes which tried so hard to be amusing. She took a larger view of these things now, but she needed time to concentrate her thoughts. She accused herself still of being indolent and cowardly, and determined that even pot-boiling should be done earnestly and heartily. It did not occur to her to remember that, even in a place of retirement of her own, she would find it impossible to live in that state of exaltation which is generally followed by reaction in the case of every mortal. And it also exposed her to other evils. It made it more



and more difficult for her to deny herself to outsiders. Men who heard that she had a studio would occasionally find it out, send up their cards, and ask leave to look at a few of Miss Newbolt's pictures; so that, careful as she was to deny herself to these intruders, she found herself sometimes taken by surprise. These accidents which were annoying to her might have accounted for a slight return of her former mood. Certain it was that she began to work with more fitful energy, and when she returned in the evenings to Mary and the children she would be less ready to converse with them, sinking back into long intervals of silence.

And when one day Mary told her of a gentleman who wished to be introduced to her—a Signor Villari—she did not know the name—a musician, and artist like herself—who had admired her paintings, and longed to befriend her, she gave her consent somewhat grudgingly and unwillingly, as if it were all a part of the necessary inconveniences associated with her growing fame.

“One has to be on one's guard against these Bohemians, though one is a Bohemian one's self,” she explained. “I came to London to make myself ‘a lodge in a vast wilderness’, and it is not my fault if it will no longer remain a wilderness for *me*.”

“Most artists are alike, with an eye for a pretty girl or a beautiful woman,” Mrs. Carruthers acknowledged, “but this one has not seen you yet, and he seems to be actuated entirely by a wish to befriend you. He told me he could give you an introduction to some American dealers, and those introductions are not to be despised, as you have to pay a nurse for taking care of the child—and have ‘pot-boilers’ to dispose of as well as I have.”

It seemed very chivalrous of him, as Zina murmured in answer, but it was not the first time she had met with chivalrous men. She did not confide



in Mary who was present at the first meeting, the habit having grown on her of keeping difficulties to herself; but Mary was not deceived by the way in which the two people—supposed to be strangers—looked into each other's eyes. "I should have been quite taken aback," as she said afterwards, "if I did not feel sure it was not really your first meeting."

"No, I used to meet him at my father's house. He always played well, though he had not much voice *then*—he has developed it since—and I suppose his relations must object to his *début* as an opera-singer, since he calls himself Villari; his real name is Dewe. I think these affectations in the changes of names rather ridiculous," was all she said in explanation, not deeming it necessary to tell the whole truth for fear of implicating Stephen though she was vexed at his device, and only excused it because she would otherwise have refused to see him.

It was on the tip of Mary's tongue to answer, "I don't wish to vex you, but for God's sake think of the gossips, they have said enough already," but the recollection of how Zina invariably laughed at her with the quick rejoinder. "'What say they? Let them say'—it matters nothing what people say about us behind our backs," kept her from remonstrating. Zina, as she acknowledged to herself, could some times be led but never driven, and nine times out of ten she would "gang her own gait."

She was too proud even to speak to him about the *ruse* he had adopted. Why indeed should she refer to the past, or make any allusion to the days when she had met him at her father's house, still less to those more miserable days, when he had allowed an ignoble suspicion to take root in his heart? She was a little glad that he should know the absurdity of that suspicion now. But for the rest she desired to live as an artist, only in cloud-



land, or in other words, in her "wilderness," ignoring the disasters she had passed through. And so long as he, also an artist, was content to live in cloudland too, and only to converse on things which belonged to the sphere of art, she saw no reason why she should not allow him to do his best to enliven her solitude.

So when Stephen Dewe took to lounging in his spare hours into the great empty room which Zina had engaged as a studio, cheering her up by retailing to her the witty discussions and brilliant paradoxes, the *bon mots* of the literary world—such as she had heard at her father's table—she saw no reason why she should not make an exception in his favour, and admit him as an old friend whose talk seemed to annihilate the dreary interval between the past and present, and bring a sense of exhilaration to the intellect such as she had not known since her father's death.

As time passed on the great room was no longer ugly and empty, for Zina had disguised its ugliness with palms, ferns, dried grasses, and plaster casts, which cost her little, and yet made a picturesque litter.

She had her anatomical models, and even her skeleton which was reverently covered up after she had studied from it, much to her visitor's amusement, but her other surroundings were beautiful. For Zina, who did not like things new, had managed to pick up some pieces of deliciously faded silk covered with old embroidery which she had bought for a mere song because other people scorned them. One of the old pieces of embroidery was even moth-eaten, but she insisted on keeping it because it reminded her of a bit of Italian tapestry, with golden fruit and winged boys, purchased at Florence, which she had left behind her in her old home. She loved these things for their intrinsic beauty and it never occurred



to her to think of the pretty background they supplied to her own graceful figure seated at the easel, robed in sage-green cashmere, which also was economical as Mary had cut it out, and Mary's daughters helped to make it for her with the sewing-machine which manufactured nearly everything in the Carruthers' household. Yet it had the artist's touch about it, and fitted her like a glove.

Stephen Dewe shewed tact. He seldom spoke of himself, and never referred to the past, but he could be entertaining and even witty; his career had developed him.

And more than once, to her astonishment, Zina found herself ready to joke in answer, and to wonder why she had so dreaded meeting again with this man, who bore so slight a likeness to the undeveloped Stephen Dewe of her earlier recollections. It seemed no such important or terrible affair after all. Her nerves must have been overstrained with morbid brooding over trifles, when she had admitted to herself that if Stephen Dewe had not been diplomatic—introducing himself, in Mary's presence, under a pseudonyme which surprised her—she would certainly have refused to see him, and more decidedly than she declined to see other men, who, once admitted, would have buzzed about her like flies.

"It was foolish and self-conscious of me," she thought to herself, "as if that love-story had not been dropped so long ago that it would be impossible for him to take up the threads of it even if I were not as I am—a woman doomed to long widowhood, and wedded to misfortune."

She had honestly striven to renounce all recollection of former happiness, and never for an instant suspected fate of forging fresh links to bring her into contact with a former lover; yet, unconventional as ever, she did not know how to define the exact



standard of manner in a case so complicated. He had suggested a piano as an ornament which might be useful at the farthest corner of the studio, and she—feeling that she could not accept a favour from him—made a show of consenting, and hired a piano herself, not knowing that by the subtle influence of music she was supplying him once more with the power of bringing mind to bear upon mind. For music is one of the mysteries which transcends the gift of speech, with a means of awakening the tender emotion which no words can ever equal. “Is music a forgotten language of which the sense is lost while the sound only remains? Is it reminiscence? Is it the primeval language,—or the language of a future state of existence?” an Italian thinker has asked. But that it had a power of interfusing unexpressed sympathetic thought into the innermost nature of any sensitive being was unsuspected by one of these two people. Nor did Zina guess when she listened to the dulcet harmonies, with that sharp pain at the heart which enervated her, and to which she had become accustomed so long ago, that these sounds were drawing them together as by an irresistible force.

At their first meeting Stephen Dewe had thought her less beautiful. Something had changed in her face; the brilliancy of the eyes had suddenly become extinguished. He was aware of the subtle difference, though the majority of people would have seen little alteration in her. She had indeed from the first made up her mind not to “wear her heart on her sleeve” and latterly it had been her habit when looking at herself in the mirror to determine to let no wrinkle—no drawn face—betray her to the outward world.

Now and then those same eyes shone with a strange far-away light which he did not understand.

He had heard fragments of her story, and piecing them together had judged the husband rather than



the wife, reproaching himself bitterly for his weakness in having lost her, and yet, inconsistently enough, he had suspected her of attitudinising before the world, in an attitude common, as he thought bitterly, to her sex.

But after a time he changed his opinion about this last indictment. Zina was simple as ever, and her own worst enemy, exalted as ever in her idealism, and only too ready to accuse herself of faults of which she was innocent as a baby. He experienced all the pleasure he had felt in playing to her when she had been a simple child—as if her senses had been more acute than other people's. He remembered how, in the old days when he had known her intimately, the smell of the rain had been delightful to her, and the sunshine had affected her pleasurable with a new joy in existence. And now to these childish impressions were added the intellectual and spiritual development of a woman who had thought, felt, and suffered in a way which seemed to be revealed to him by the telepathy between them. He began to thank the great masters, ancient and modern—Bach, Handel, Schubert, Rubinstein, Wagner, and Grieg—who supplied him with the means of inducing something of the same state of mind in her which he felt to be in himself.

It reminded her of the former days when, in the seclusion of her father's house, he had been in the habit of improvising and reproducing the divine melodies which were continually entrancing her, but which, unaided, she could never reproduce. He alone of all others seemed to have the power to help her to forget the past, and seize the beauty which eluded her when she tried to paint it. She was never weary of listening to him. Now it would be one of Chopin's intricate waltzes winding in and out in delicious mazes of sound, and now one of Beethoven's pathetic movements full of aspiration



and delicate feeling, which seemed to bring her inspiration and comfort chasing away the bitterness of despair.

Her gentle "thank you" as she looked up from her work, or the pleading "go on—one wants to hear that twice," were all that he needed, whilst only to look at her picturesque head, draped sometimes in a becoming *fichu* and to please himself with her winning manner was all the reward he needed.

One day he wandered into the studio where she was sitting as usual painting, with signs of weariness in her drooping figure, and for the first time the conversation drifted into the personal, he begging her not to work so hard. "It is hateful to see you fagging like this," he said, as he went to the piano and struck a few chords on it. Then, without waiting for her answer, he began to sing. It was one of the last new songs of the great German composer, Johannes Brahms. The theme was of hope, of life, of love. Every note, every pause, every *nuance* of expression in the highly-cultivated tenor voice with its full rich timbre conveyed a definite meaning to the listener. He had counted on the effect it would produce just as a skilful physician could calculate on the effect of a drug, and smiled to himself as he saw the lightening of her eyes.

"I must not be a creature of impulse; I was that once, with time slipping away and nothing achieved," she said.

"There is such a thing as being womanly without being womanish. You are an adept at your art, but you are not one of those unsexed women who can fight with men for their daily bread."

He played as he talked and she put down her brush in an attitude of thoughtful, not unpleasant, meditation, the resonance of the full chords rousing magnetic feeling in nerves and brain.

And once more he sang in tones which allured



and vibrated, supplemented by the bewitching strain of a running accompaniment on the piano. This time he had chosen an Italian song, every note corresponding to some unuttered human feeling, unexpressed in speech. It was a song which shewed off the full compass of his voice, rising like a flute in the upper notes, and then again descending to solemn organ-fulness in the lower ones.

The change in Zina's face became marked as she listened. And once again the pathos and the pity of human life were revealed to her in the surging restless chords as he plunged into a *morceau* of Wagner's wildest music, the last notes climbing higher and yet higher as if they would take the seventh heaven by storm, and repeat the offence of Prometheus by stealing fire from Paradise.

Zina sighed. Every nerve in her will was in subjection to her emotion. And again he recalled the girlish days when her eyes had filled at the same sounds with passionate adoration, and when he—fool that he was—had undervalued that dangerous, intoxicating, worshipping sort of love, as for a hero or a demi-god, making one tremble for the girl. He remembered how he had presumed on its continuance, though neither of them had dared to make it known to her father, and then how it had cooled as she grew older.

"I am *only* a musician," he said with mock humility. "My father was a musician before me."

And she, whom he had hitherto contemned in his secret heart for the new reserve of what he called her "frozen manners," answered unwisely with passionate vehemence, "I would rather inherit distinction of that sort than any amount of land or titles."



## CHAPTER XVI

**"WE CAN NEVER SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN."**

ZINA reproached herself for her impulsiveness when Stephen Dewe left her that afternoon, telling herself that she did not wish to be thrown so much in his society, and that it was undesirable they should find coincidences of thought. At first she had felt positive that she should experience the same disappointment in this constant association with him which he would be sure to feel with her, but she was beginning to be less certain and to have a fear lest his admiration for her should suddenly be re-kindled.

"Why should I be afraid of anything now? I have known the worst which life can send me. I am a faded woman, as lonely as an Indian widow and banned by the opinion of the world," she said to herself. But there were days when she trembled a little, and took herself to task for vanity in the mere fact of that trembling.

She was in state of mental discomfort aware of



the artificiality of the position between them, and yet unwilling to discuss the question with Mary. A sort of instinct prompted her not even to show him that which she considered to be incomparably her best picture. She hastily stopped him when he tried to look at it. "I reserve my best things; they are not for everyone, not even for my friends," she said, taxing herself afterwards for affectation in the excuse. "We have all of us our pictures or our writings in which we tell our secrets, as a poet tells his in his poems, and you tell yours in your music—we are never inclined to part with them for money."

"That is all very well when people have independent money, or make as much as you do by your sketches, but what about the other poor devils who are obliged to sell their secrets?" he laughed back in reply, as she stooped over a portfolio to hide the rush of crimson which suddenly dyed her cheeks.

The same instinct might have warned her how unwise had been her policy in begging Mary not to let her children come so often to her studio, to help her to clean her palette or put away her brushes; the senses of children being far keener than those of adults which are blunted with age, and the comments which the elder girl had made having more than once become awkward.

Stephen's hurry to dismiss the little girls might have opened her eyes, since the race of children from whom anything can be hidden is becoming beautifully less, but in spite of all she had gone through she was still an idealist and would not admit the possibility of new evils to herself.

Mary was not suspicious when she found that her girls had been discouraged from making their constant visits. Their very glee, their animation, their bubbling merriment, as they in their simplicity



plied their mother's friend with tiresome questions, — their cheeks dimpling with pleasure as they taxed their inventiveness to dress the lay-figure in the newest types of fashion—might have been supposed to be amusing, had there not been a fear that their blunt directness would ferret out secrets unknown to the artist herself.

A sort of languor came over Zina as the days grew hotter and she began to look with expectant interest for Stephen's music. She felt a little desolate if he did not come, and was reassured when she heard his footsteps on the threshold. He began to take his ease as a familiar friend, criticising her work. It was unconventional, as Mary told her. But she put Mary off with a smile which was so innocent that the latter felt she might as well reason with an unsophisticated child.

"Is he not my *friend*" she asked with that smile, "one of the last links with my old home. Are all the friendships to be destroyed because people will be artificial?"

One day when she had been suffering with headache, and he chatting on as he brought her a budget of news from the outer world, keeping her "posted up," as they both expressed it, in the latest political and social events, her suffering mastered her.

The work which she had been finishing lately had been thoroughly against the grain, and she was the first to depreciate it.

"It is horribly bad," she said looking at it with an expression of disgust, whilst the headache which had disguised itself for some time returned with fresh virulence—thud—thud, with a sickening sensation as if hammers were beating on her brain.

"There is nothing so silly as to paint," she added, "without being tremendously in earnest."

She put down her brushes, and pressed her hands suddenly to her head, "Oh, if the pain would not



go on like that—if I could know what it was altogether to forget."

It was an unwise cry, and as he heard it a wild joy filled his heart. He was not a practised intriguer and the desire to throw off disguises came upon him so strongly that it resolved itself in action. There was a sound as of rushing water in his ears, as something in that pale loveliness which he found it difficult to resist prompted him to put his hand on her shoulder in a brotherly way, which was almost caressing.

"Obey me," he said, "and put away that painting—you work too often and too much—go away—you are nervous and need a change—I understand you better now than when I knew you first. I blame myself severely for not having understood then that you were nervously agonised, with a highly-impressionable disposition inherited not only from your father, but probably also from your Russian mother—did you not once tell me that you believed she was a Russian? The very fact that music makes such an immense impression on you proves that you are very"—he had almost said "*fin de siècle*," but rejected the affected expression for "receptive,"—adding "much more receptive than the majority of cold-blooded Englishwomen. You are nervous now, because you are overstrained and need a change which you are quite well able to afford—put the painting away."

It was the first time he had ventured to touch her, but she did not resent his touch.

She asked herself why she should shrink? — this man had been her *friend*. He sang and his singing had eased her of a feeling of tension, it had helped her to wrestle with her difficulties. He talked brilliantly and her troubles were dwarfed. How did she know that he might not help her with his clearer wisdom to make those wise deductions of the best to be done under difficult circumstances,



in which no one else could help her? Her conscience suggested Mary. But Mary from her very goodness was narrow and timorous, praying every night that the hosts of darkness might not approach her home; it seemed a curious fact that Mary, of all people in the world, owing to her kindness in the past should be mixed up at all with a scandal. Mary must have known, when she spoke tenderly to her friend, how the Professor would have acted; how he would have cast Mrs. Layton off lest she should defile his girls. Zina was conscious of a thickening in her throat as she remembered how this last asylum might have failed her had not Mary been widowed.

It seemed for the moment to be a relief to have some male friend to turn to.

She did not reason about it, as she gathered up the brushes, putting them away obediently in the box. On the contrary she felt tempted to tell him all. The longing for an ear into which she could pour out her story—for some man, old enough to be her listener—a man, **if** possible, with the training and experience of a Roman Catholic priest, was at times insufferable. But then again she would shrink from laying bare her private experiences, deeming it mean to tell a tale which could not be told without in some way implicating her husband, and something whispered to her that Stephen Dewe's was not exactly the ear to which the story of her secret struggles should be poured out. Yet she sighed, and her voice sounded strangely in her throat. A sudden weakness had come upon her, an egoism which was unusual. How could she expect others to make excuses for her, she argued, when her secret was still unknown to any other human being than herself? Was it not hard to persevere shrouded in this mantle of silence?

"I wish I could tell you," she said wistfully, still with that impulse to confide in someone who did



not know her intimately enough to be able to accuse her of speaking disparagingly of her husband—not a matter-of-fact woman who would be likely to remind her that she had been too young and too confiding in not making more minute inquiries before her marriage—but a man who could not question her too much about all the circumstances. Yet her sensitive conscience kept her tongue-tied, reproaching her already with the weakness it would be wiser to subdue.

And once more she reasoned with herself. If only there had been *anyone* to whom she could open her heart instead of shrinking as she did from Mary's prim conventionality—anyone who would understand her sensation of complete dissatisfaction with herself as well as with the other persons implicated, and who would somehow help her out of it, perhaps enabling her to make a new beginning! She did not undervalue Mary's love, but Mary, as she had before acknowledged to herself, was too much of a housewife and too little of a dreamer, occupied for the sake of her children with the material necessities of life, to be a confidante in matters of this sort, or to enter at all earnestly into her friend's sense of paralysis in grappling with things condoned by the majority.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION.

THE struggle was so great that it was as if two parallel lines of thought, in each of which there seemed to be no deflection, were present to her mind; she was not aware that she was inclining to one side or the other.

"Confide in *me*—once for all—I implore you," he said, in tones hoarse with emotion, and turning deadly white as the suggestion of trouble in her face was reflected in his own as in a mirror; "there is no one in all the world who is so ready to lay down his life to help you."

But the lines of thought in her mind were no longer parallel. She shrank from him visibly. The *de profundis* cry had roused her to a sense of her present danger.

He waited anxiously for her answer. But there was no movement of her mobile lips; her hands were still pressed together as she sat staring at him evidently incapable of reply, and dreading the ghosts



of the future just as she had been hoping to slay the ghosts of the past. She was hard on herself at that moment, ruthlessly cruel to her own weakness, accusing herself of putting herself blindly and wickedly in the power of a man whose love was not yet dead for her. If such a horrible thing existed as any answering feeling on her part, it might account for the tumult just then raging within her—a tumult which affected her bodily health while she had been trying to keep up the appearance of calmness.

“Surely,” he continued in that strange hoarse voice, “there should be no such thing as feeling wretched when we are near each other. Whatever may have happened you have the greater part of your life before you. You think you have *lived*, but I tell you that you have not; you have only vegetated, or suffered, while the healthy joy of life should be yours.”

His speech terrified her with its sudden vehemence; she looked at him strangely. She thought she had given away all the love she possessed, but was it possible that from the dead branches lopped down to the roots, there could spring fresh shoots, hardier than those which had been destroyed? A strange terror, such as had been more than once subtly communicated to her by the music, was taking possession of her again, as if some black shadow with features which she could not see were crouching behind the visible tempter. She tried to speak, but her lips were dry and stiff. High as her spirit was he was succeeding in humiliating her, for a fear for which she despised herself was upon her. Such a situation had always seemed to her to be simple, and she had despised those other women who could not release themselves from it calmly and quietly and at once. But for the first time since she had parted with George Layton and thrown herself alone on the tender mercies of the world, she felt her self-control deserting her.



A voice whispered in her ears, "You are not bound to abide by your bitter bargain. Your husband deceived you, and was united by all the ties of honour and affection to another creature, however wretched, before he met you. The tie which he formed with you was hollow and unreal. Why do you shut your eyes to the happiness which may be left? What have you to lose—you, whose name is already blackened in the estimation of the world. You have been broken-hearted and wretched, and you are offered a refuge. It is true that you love everything which is beautiful and enjoyable—the blooming flowers, the sound of music—and do not like drudging work. Why banish yourself into exile? You have only one life; why sacrifice it for a delusion?"

Then she heard Dewe's voice with its passionate appeal. "Do not punish me for ever for one foolish mistake. I wronged you once, I mistook you, but fate has thrown us together again."

And for a moment she allowed herself to think—how would it have been supposing he had indeed become intimately related with herself—a part of her life? If she—and she began to picture to herself how everything might have been well if her father had not intervened between them. And then, mercifully, her recollection came to her assistance, and her resentment burst forth, her woman's courage rising above that of the man's, and shaming him.

"There is no such thing as fate being too strong for anyone," she said, and then her voice suddenly burst into desperate sobbing. "Have you altogether buried the horrible thoughts you once had of me?" she asked, "when you tortured your imagination, thinking strange things about me, and when you drove me almost mad and left me in that condition of madness. It spoilt my life!"

He had grown pale; and hollows were in his cheeks which she had never seen before, as she



continued, scarcely able to control the trembling of her lips, or properly shape the words.

"Oh, I am older now, and I understand perfectly that you, who had only your music, could not be expected to know anything about psychology or pathology. Long words are they not?" she added with a mocking laugh. And then more gravely, "I pity you in the past as much as I pity myself. For I know what you thought of me—thought of me when I was delirious, and in my weakness and delirium accused myself of monstrosities. Could I help being a woman—weak and worn-out with all I had gone through?—women are said to be inconsequent, illogical, fanciful! I have never allowed these imputations on my sex and do not allow them now. But there are times when bodily sickness prostrates women more than men—times when those who are stronger should stand by us—when—"

"For pity's sake, say no more." He was at her feet. Never had he felt the dross in his nature, the shame of self which checked his utterance—as at a moment like this.

It was too late, the spell was broken.

"You tried to analyse my character just now," she said, looking at him with a new impulse of disdain, "and now let me try to analyse *you*. You are an artist, without much inherent energy, and your power of shaping your own life vanishes into viewless air, like the music which you can extemporize but never originate. Your admiration of me, ever since I have known you, has been only artistic. But for you," she continued with a break in her voice, "my whole life might have been different from what it is. You were the first to cause me bitter disappointment, and to make me lose my faith in the ideal. It was not your fault that when you left me it was not *in you* to comprehend all that you had broken in me, and how the terrible



part would be for me to *live*—death seldom seems very hard to the despairing young who have scarcely tightened their grasp on life—but to live on, disenchanted, that was harder! And now you come to me—the devil prompting you—”

Once more she could not complete her sentence. She tried to speak, but the effort was useless, resolving itself in no syllable. Her mental strength was failing her, but her spiritual force became dominant. She would prove to herself that she had will-power, knowing that the situation must not be dallied with, but put an end to at once. So that when he cast himself at her feet, telling her that he had always meant to come back, that he had never imagined she would forget him, she said with a supreme effort. “The deadly nightshade grows close to such forget-me-nots; and even forgiveness in my case does not imply what *you* call love.”

To argue might be to succumb; she felt it, and had recourse to gesture to indicate her wish to be alone.

He admired the magnificence of her outlines, the tragic dignity of the pose of her figure, when she waved him back and added, “You should have respected me as you would have respected a cloistered nun—or a widow—bound by sacred vows to perpetual widowhood! If you had not spoken like this you might have been my *friend*—I might have forgiven you though I could never have forgotten. I had overlooked the past, indeed I trusted you as a helper—a solacer of my solitude; but now all that is impossible, and I know how mad I have been to think that it could be possible. O heaven, the pity of it! If I had thought for one moment that I could be misconstrued—that you could not come to me as a brother comes—that the familiarity which I had called friendship—the music which had helped me over the difficult



places—would give rise to misconception—to thoughts like *these*—thoughts to be ashamed of—to lower one to the dust! Go, it is your fault—it was not in you to understand friendship—you have taught me that there is no such thing as that purer atmosphere which I in my imbecility—poor fool that I was—dreamt of. Go, we can never see each other again.”

He would willingly have protracted the interview, but he saw no means of doing it. It was as if the loftiness of her spirit overpowered him, and he flinched before it.

“Go!” she repeated, obeying the finer impulses which so often serve women better than their colder and more calculating reflections; “now that I know you feel in this way—the very fact of your feeling so prevents us from being friends. Why should you linger here? The sooner we part the better. I shall never regret it—go!” she repeated, ashamed of the growing agitation in her voice; “we may meet in the next world—if there is an after-life—but never again in *this*.”

And he left her, obeying a parting look which would cause her always to be sublime to his memory. He had been a sybarite and a dreamer all his life, but in that moment he felt that he should never regret not having sacrificed her good name to his egotism and selfishness.

In another instant she was alone, but stood rooted to the spot. The crisis of danger and mortal agony was past, but the recollection of it was like a girder of iron about her heart. “How intoxicating, how deceiving the dead sleep of conscience, but ah, the waking—the waking!” she thought to herself. “Oh, the hard and bitter realities of life!”

Saved as if by the merest accident, escaping by the skin of her teeth from the cruel tender mercies of this last so-called *friend*, who had abused the cordial familiarity to which she, in her forlorn



solitude, had thought to admit him, she hated herself for the weakness which had so nearly overcome her. There was a throbbing pain at her heart. Would it break down altogether, and end in physical disease? The passionate sobbing had been tearless, and even now she was denied the bodily relief of tears. She opened one of the windows and let the cold air blow on her, as if to help her to think. And then she thought of the picture which for the last few weeks had been resting against the wall, with a piece of brocade thrown over it to keep it from vulgar eyes.

She remembered how she had not been able to show it to Stephen Dewe because she felt that she had not merely painted the portrait of a man; how it had roused her from her state of desolation and stupefaction, and how latterly she had been trying to persuade herself that this feeling was superstitious.

She took it up tenderly and put it on the easel, feeling more sure than ever that she could never exhibit it. Possibly it had a message for her! Was it true, as she had heard Mary's friends argue, that no one could speak sincerely of duty without implying his trust in some unseen Power, strong enough to infuse strength into the will of man?

She had stoutly denied the proposition, but were not the old ethical conceptions everywhere falling into discredit? Were not the very data on which right and wrong rested called into question? It was not possible for her to ignore the reality and intensity of the present crisis in morality; and in her mood of self-aborrence the dicta of science seemed no longer capable of being the sole guides for educated man.

Her feet, which were not patient, had now reached the bottom of the valley of humiliation—there were no fresh depths for her to traverse. Now at least she could be poor in spirit, thinking



as she hoped for mercy, more mercifully of a temperament which was so different from her own—and more pitifully of temptations of which she had hitherto had no comprehension. She longed for the love which pardons offences, but she longed for purity also, since a love which allowed itself to be dragged in the mire could not help to raise a fellow-mortal. She yearned for something which could help tottering footsteps, her own as well as her husband's, and cried through the darkness.

“God, if thou dost exist, deign to shew thyself to me—let the vision become once more real, without fancies deceiving me! I have loved Thy creatures desperately and madly, with a love which should have been given to Thee. I am rightly and justly punished, and now with the dregs of life, with affections squandered on nothingness, I come to offer myself to Thee. How do I dare to do it?”

And then came the merciful relief of tears and she wept as only such women weep, with teeth set, and mouth compressed, struggling against her weakness.

She was worn-out, pale to the lips, and evidently exhausted, when she appeared at the frugal breakfast-table on the following morning; yet with a strength which had never failed her she forced herself to seem collected, and no one asked her any questions.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### GEORGE LAYTON VISITS THE STUDIO.

GEORGE LAYTON had never been the same man since Zina left him.

At first he had tried to reason with himself in spite of the somewhat incoherent letter which she had left pinned to the dressing-table, and perhaps on the very account of its incoherency, that his wife would think the better of it and come back soon. All women, as he said to himself, protested more than they meant, and perhaps when sufficient pressure was put on her she would retract. The worst which could happen would be a silly visit to London, or to some of her friends in the country. He thought instantly of the Carruthers and remembered that Mary Carruthers was a woman to be trusted. And so he gave out that a lady had sent for Mrs. Layton, one of her former friends, who was seriously ill, and that she had asked him to make her apologies for her, feeling in his secret heart that as soon as the other women cleared out the better he would be pleased.



It rained all the day, but she did not return at nightfall, nor on the next day. When her maid told him that no tidings had been received from her, and that reports were about in the village, he answered, with a wild gesture which made the girl recoil as if he had aimed a blow at her, "It is not true," and then with an effort he recovered himself—so strong was his desire to keep up appearances. He walked more than once into Zina's rooms, remembering how they had laughed together in happier days at the hangings with the antique and abandoned forms which nature had done her best to obliterate and which were revived again in these curious Japanese imaginings, and looked with loathing at the dressing-table on which he had found the letter announcing her resolve. He remembered how he had taken special pains in choosing that article of furniture. It was delicately carved and inlaid with small china tiles, hand-painted and executed from the designs of Walter Crane. A number of little drawers had contained her costly trinkets, and he found on looking through them that not a trinket he had given her had been taken. It was more mortifying still to discover on examining her jewel-box, the key of which had been carefully enclosed in the letter, that all the costly presents he had showered on her—the diamonds, pearls, and sapphires—had been left behind.

He took up a necklace of opals—her favourite amongst the ornaments—and gazed at the varying colours of the stones; he had seen it last with the milky azure, pink, and violet gleaming on the shining satin of her neck and shoulders. But he had known that she had never cared for jewels, and that she had always resented the way in which he had forced her to display her charms for the benefit of other men who might gaze on them and appreciate them. He had looked upon her as a possession



to be his to his dying day. Had he not paid the full price for his right of property in her, and had it not added to his satisfaction that other people should think highly of what he had paid for? But he knew as he looked at the jewels that he had never been able to tarnish her, and that something intangible, immaterial, had escaped him even in the days when he had thought to bind her.

He took the letter out of his pocket and read it again, perceiving for the first time a hurried post-script like a rider to the document, which increased his anguish and his anger.

"Do not be afraid that anyone will blame you. I take all the blame for what has happened on myself. It is my intention to resume my maiden name."

For the first time he reasoned that there were ante-chambers in her nature, locked and barred to men like him, depths which his plummet line could never penetrate. From the beginning she had never wearied him with aimless chatter, and though his own careless hands had been ready to thrust her forth in paths which might have lowered a weaker and less modest nature, there had been no parade or flourish of trumpets in the display of her attractions. And even when she had made her last fatal discovery, and when she had had courage to reproach him to his face, she was not a woman to wear him out with perpetual complaining.

Had such scenes been repeated he might have learnt to hate her, but it was only that once. She had spared him, taking the burden on her young shoulders, and had perceived with admirable common-sense that nothing could be gained by mutual recrimination. She had said her say and she had left him. He had not seen much of her lately; he did not admit to himself at once that this was partly his own fault, and that from his youth upwards there had been times when he had pre-



ferred the company of men whose subtle, moral taint had contaminated everything. He had called his wife a prude; he had set himself to lower her ideal. In vain!

He had told himself that he hated women of the Lady Byron type, and that if poor Byron had married his early love his whole life might have been different. But whether he was justified in that opinion or not, he could not pretend that Zina had had anything in common with that feminine type.

There had been nothing irritating in his wife's parade of goodness, and she had never before attempted to cast imputations upon him,—imputations which might bring out all that was reprobate in his nature. On the contrary she had been sympathetic and tolerant and never given to sermonising.

“Empty and dark is the house without her,  
Empty and dark through the open door.”

He did not know why it was that this woman had so slipped into her place that he could not do without her. He wondered that he could not; for it would only have been in accordance with his former life if, in the rage of a man baffled by fate, he had been able to curse her and forget her.

For he had ever been governed by impulse, and had too often “ceased to care,” and did not consider himself responsible for the wasted fires, and the impulses of youth which had so frequently died out. That poor woman who was dead, for instance, had been only a pretty empty-headed doll, who had not understood that constancy was not possible to him, and of whom he had wearied when satiated by possession. He had intended to “do handsomely by her”, if she had not been so insane as to reject his offers of money and he tried to persuade himself, even now, that his conduct towards her had not been incompatible with the code of honour



practised by gentlemen. But it was different with his wife.

Not many months had passed and yet her presence had become as natural to him as the trees and the flowers, the pictures on the walls, and the birds which sang in his garden.

"I will have patience," he said, "and keep up a dignified silence, and she will return to me penitent. She will not be able to support herself, and will miss the luxuries and all the comforts with which I surrounded her. Beautiful women are capricious and whimsical, but as they grow older they learn to adapt themselves to other people. And meanwhile we must avoid a scandal."

So as the time went on, and the house was emptying of guests, one story after another came glibly to his lips. But scandal was too much for him. It stole into his house decked in sable robes, and seated itself determinately beside his hearth. He tried his best to snap his fingers at it, and to avoid the annoying scenes, the indefinite innuendoes, all made at the expense of the woman whom his sense of justice prompted him to protect. The better part of his nature made him feel that a cut direct to himself would have been as nothing, a mere flea-bite, compared to his agony of vexation about his wife. And yet infuriated as he was at the remarks which were made at her expense, he was only the more inclined to blame the absurdity by which she had brought them on herself—choosing to stand like St. Simeon Stylites on her self-chosen pillar. His friends, on their part, somewhat naturally complained that it was impossible for them to tell what attitude to take in the matter.

Eva Capern was having recourse to compromise as usual; Eva angry, nervously fidgetty, and wishing with all her heart that she could have managed to get away before there was time for the storm to



break, tried to say boldly that nothing was the matter. Some of the women were shocked, others had a perplexed air; some laughed in their own bedrooms and said that these sort of things always happened to those of their sex who pretended to keep up a higher standard than their neighbours. Others were a little pale and agitated, but all were ready with their opinions and surmises, whilst in all the bedrooms was the scurry of hurried packing up.

But nearly all in turns came to Mrs. Capern. "Dear Mrs. Capern, can *you* explain? What does it all mean? Such things as this really don't happen in our world."

"You are right—*cela ne fait pas*—Mrs. Layton is only a little unconventional," said Eva speaking in spite of herself in a voice which was a trifle unsteady.

Here was a roof which she had wanted to feel sure of having over her head always in an emergency, and her wits must not desert her. What was the use? she asked herself, when all was said. Why should she mind being thrown off her guard and tempted to satisfy these women's easily-stirred curiosity? After all she knew little herself, but there was an eager glitter in the eyes of some of her questioners which for once almost sickened her, and she found it hard to answer them with suavity. When she made the best of it they only shrugged their shoulders, reminding themselves that Mrs. Capern was Zina Layton's friend, and that friends were always expected to say that sort of thing, however bad they might know the case to be. After a time Eva's prudence relaxed and she could not resist making little confidences in private and these confidences were more or less to her friend's discredit. She intended to say nothing unkind on the score of discreet friendship; but there were times when supposed secrets leaked from her dainty lips, as they do from the lips of the majority of women.



Otherwise, to do her justice, she laughed and talked her brightest, after Zina's sudden departure, as a means of diverting suspicion. It was long since she had ceased to hope that the case would admit of arbitration, or that George Layton would allow her to speak to him about it. But this sullen mood of his in which everyone felt it awkward to be expected to show just the right amount of sympathy which might not involve condolence, only made the tongues wag more loudly as the packing went on in the different rooms.

A woman who looked like a picture as she sat at the head of the table and outshone her various guests, was not likely to meet with much mercy at the hands of her own sex. Sometimes, they remembered, she would sit at the table and look at them as if she did not see them, or saw beyond them, and for that they did not forgive her. They were antipathetic to her, and she had not hesitated to let them see it; a woman who could only make herself thoroughly agreeable to what fitted into her own temperament was not likely to be popular. And so, from the very house in which they had been entertained, various versions of the story filtered, maddening Layton when he heard of them. No one had any pity on Zina. What could you expect? they asked. She had been brought up as an artist, and it was almost always the same miserable story with these sort of people who had to work in a public way to get their own bread. "Bred in the bone, you see!" they quoted with solemn shakes of the head, which horrified Mrs. Grundy and was intended to horrify her—"there were a good many queer stories afloat about the girl and her father before the marriage, and as to the mother—the mere riff-raff of the streets—he had her educated, you know; but think of the influence! What could you expect?" asked the gossips, dropping their voices as



they discoursed with scraps of learning about heredity.

When George Layton heard of it he compared his friends of the other sex to a lot of "cats" in his disgust; but cats or not, their claws did not scratch *him*; they were wrapped in velvet whenever they came near him. He knew that his wife had offended them, that she had paid them the ill compliment of evidently not enjoying herself when she was in their company, and that she had treated them in the same high-handed way in which she had treated himself, leaving him because she would not give in to the empty falsehoods required to keep up appearances. It was unheard of and not of this world. And yet he was generous enough to recognise that she was sacrificing herself to take on her own shoulders the duties which he had left undone. A woman touched so easily by the pain of others and moved to such self-denying charity—a case like this had never hitherto come to his cognisance!

He tried not to think too much about it, as he waited for the progress of time which was to waft her back to his feet like seaweed or driftwood cast up by the waves.

He persuaded himself that it could only be a question of time, that he would rule this woman as he had ruled others of her sex. For a little while indeed, after he had first met her, he had known regret, sorrow for wasted opportunities and for lost ideals. But then he had found the conquest comparatively easy, and it soon became natural to him, in accordance with the whole method of his life, to determine to bend her will to his, instead of raising himself up to her. There had been days indeed when he had even taken himself to task for the mad impulse which determined him to marry this woman. But now that he continued to miss her and to long for her coming back, a sort of shame came over him, and the immense self-esteem which



he had managed to hide under a nonchalant manner, was for the first time shaken. Still he argued that had he told her the story himself, instead of allowing her to find it out and so get the first word, he could have explained it in such a way as to vindicate his honour. Men like himself could plead the intensity of their vitality, and their warmth of passion which should cover a multitude of minor sins. Still he scarcely wished to see the look again which he could never forget in those great agonised dark-lashed eyes of hers—eyes which condemned and which searched him through and through, lit from the fire of anguish which flamed in her soul. Women took a little while to get over scenes like *that*, and possibly absence for a short time might not be unbeneficial; meanwhile he could not sleep, and he had recourse first of all to increased quantities of alcohol and next to doses of opium.

He had tried to comfort himself when first Zina left him by imagining that he should be more at ease, and independent—not being the first man who had made the experiment of matrimony and afterwards suspected that bachelor comfort might be best after all. But though at first when they were alone together, he had been conscious of a curious sort of relief when he could lock the door of his private apartments and feel that the demands made upon him by a high-pressure life were withdrawn for a time; though his wife's ideals were so different from the Rochefoucauldian maxims he had adopted for himself, there were days when he felt now that it would have been infinitely better to have been confronted by her scorn, rather than left to himself. He did not like to face his friends in London, and the zest for travelling seemed to have been blunted; but the loneliness of his country life was hard on him. He began to be more and more nervous.

The continual suffering which he had tried to



defy, the aching sense of humiliation, the desire which he could not satisfy, and the wild hope tearing at his heart that some time or other his wife would come back as quietly as she had gone, were wearing him day by day. He had not the panacea of work, as Zina had, to help him to defy his grief; the opium was telling on him and he was beginning to succumb. Even the closing of a door echoed with a muffled sound, reverberating through the desolate house to a fancy which had never before been distempered.

He was ill, and needed a doctor, but there was no one to nurse him, and he began to wonder how he should endure his lonely life—how get through that arid, dry period of uninteresting middle age, which is the dulllest and dreariest period of existence. He had always pitied those poor wretches who were hampered by middle-age cares, and crushed by the narrowing influences of everyday worries or straitened circumstances, but he pitied them no longer. To have other people to care for would be something—it might mitigate the boredom. And then at last the news reached him that his wife had attained success, but that in this success she was braving him, exhibiting pictures under her maiden name. She had not even taken the precaution to hide her whereabouts from him. It was more than human nature could stand. He had not outraged her in any way or lost his legal rights; the utmost he had done was to force things on her contrary to her tastes, but he had never lifted his hand against her, never been cruel to her in any way, and the law was on his side; he would oblige her to return to him.

His desire to regain possession of her was suddenly inflamed by the fact that other men had learnt to notice and appreciate her. "She is playing the fool with me," he said, laughing contemp-



tuously at the idea that he should have any difficulty in his quest, when one afternoon he found his way to her studio, his features peaked and almost haggard, the external crust of the bodily frame wearing out with the internal conflict of the last few months.

It was a nervous impulse which brought him to the studio, for he knew that no good could come from recrimination, and he had never had any intention of resorting to force.

The profound dejection out of which he could not reason himself was increased by the conviction that Zina would probably not deny herself when he insisted on seeing her, but that every interview with her would be a new disappointment, only bringing fresh suffering on both of them. For his wife was not a woman like the generality of women, so weak as to be for ever yielding to the touch of circumstances. It was a bitter knowledge to him that she had been in the right, and that the tragedy might have been averted which still threatened to spoil two lives if he had been a little less reckless of consequences. He did not understand that it was the egotism which made him see everything through coloured glasses of his own which had helped him to throw off galling recollections as if they had been old clothes. He shifted the blame on the wrong shoulders and with a sort of contemptuous self-mockery, was ready to cry, with his next breath, "What a demon the woman is! — Why could she not let bygones be bygones?"

He was expecting to find her in the room alone, as he reeled into it like a drunken man, worn and haggard-looking with a curious glitter in his eye. And then he stood arrested, drawing a deep breath. For nobody was in the room, though he had thought to surprise his wife, and had been told that she would always be in at this hour. He took in at one



glance the efforts she had made to beautify the place at small expense, the ferns, the fan palms, the plaster casts, the wet canvases, and the frescoes she had roughly drawn on an expanse of stuccoed wall; and then his eyes were attracted by the picture on the easel.

It was a subject to which he had more than once expressed an aversion, and the last which he supposed she would attempt, when she had to devote herself to an art by which she had to get her living. It was large in size and very carefully painted. The face was emaciated, but it was not the face of an ascetic, weary with the conflict of the flesh and the spirit. It was the realisation of all that was highest. Perfect purity shone from it, and there was such a concentration of feeling, such an intensity of yearning in the eyes, that he found it impossible to escape from them in any part of the room. "I will sit down," he thought to himself, "and wait till she comes back. From all that they have told me she cannot be long now."

He sat down and lit a cigar; he hoped it would steady his nerves. Then he threw the cigar down and began to walk with restless step up and down the studio. Finally he drew a small silver flask, cunningly fashioned, out of his pocket, and poured out a few drops from it, hoping it might rekindle his energy and confidence. But the native manhood on which he prided himself seemed to have gone out of him. What could possess him that he was unable to turn his eyes from the canvas, or—to put it in another way—that the eyes of the picture seemed to follow him as if they had independent existence and would not let him rest? He took out a handkerchief and began to mop his forehead, and hummed a merry tune from one of the last burlesques. Still he seemed to be impelled as by some irresistible fascination to glance again at the easel. The eyes



of the picture were looking at him in such a way that he felt it more impossible to escape from them than ever. He was uncomfortably aware of a concentration of expression in them almost amounting to magnetism, which seemed to force him to meet them whether he would or not.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

THERE seemed to be an easy means of getting rid of the uncomfortable idea, by looking at the other sketches which his wife would be preparing for exhibitions. He had heard much of these sketches as of vivid recollections of that Nature which was always true and living to Zina, and of which, even when they had been together in Switzerland, she had tried to seize the impression. He made up his mind that, under the circumstances, he could not do better than amuse himself with these until the artist returned.

But Zina had lately cared little about these sketches; she had not painted them with the poignant emotions which threatened to rend and tear her; she had not been deprived of sleep by thinking of them. Since she had sent Stephen Dewe away these smaller pictures had become of less and less consequence to her. It mattered little to her if they were skyed or if they were abused by the critics; they



were only ideas which she had to get rid of in order to devote herself to the grander work which the critics would never see. And she had latterly fallen into the habit of putting them all away that they might not interfere with the effect of that larger work on the easel. For, once again, she had been concentrating all her efforts on the subject which haunted her, once again the little miseries of life had ceased to torment; she was lost in her work, she *saw* her subject as if the veil had been again removed from her eyes. During the last few days when she had been putting fresh touches to it she had seemed to see everything else through a mist, so intent was she on the picture.

It seemed to her dry and cold, now that it was so nearly completed, compared with the idea which had been so clearly in her head. Other things which she had despised had been more or less pretentious; but *this* was not. It was living, breathing; the lips seemed to open to speak; its purity was rebuking and yet it was not sentimental—or effeminate. The *ewig weibliche* was another thing; George Layton did not undervalue it though he had so often been ready to lower womanhood and fling its glory in the dust. But this was manly, and more than manly; its manliness and its purity seemed to reproach him; he began to feel as if he could not breathe in its presence. Pshaw! it was not possible that this could be the work of his wife. Her imagination, as he remembered, always ran away with her; she could always picture extraordinary things. And yet she was one whose study of *technique* might be improved, and she would never have pretended in former days to think she could reach the highest walks of art, though she conceived her subjects in an original manner, painting as if she felt them.

This could scarcely be her work! Yet he felt



that if it was, it was a revelation of what she had suffered. In the picture before him it was as if the hidden depths of her nature were revealed; her rebellion against the world, her despair, her prostration. She had not wanted anything that was hackneyed, sophisticated, or untrue, but something which was real, which had permeated her whole being with the sense of its reality, though others might call it absurd. There was pain in the picture, but not pain that was painted physiologically, pain which the artist must have felt herself, and which somehow, very oddly, *he* began to feel. He did not know why, it was probably merely a sensation. He did not wish to probe into the hidden depths of his own consciousness; all such maudlin self-analysis had been abandoned long ago and he resented sentimental talk about the beauty of suffering, just as he resented that foolish mediæval worship of pain. And yet in the presence of this picture it was certain that he suffered. He took the flask again from his pocket hoping to steady his nerves.

He could see nothing but mawkish sentiment in the Raphaels, and had no fancy for the colouring of Titian. He condemned the flesh painting of Rubens as coarse, and turned from the comfortable-looking Madonnas of Murillo, condemning the monotony in such pictures as wearisome and unreal. Yet all were immeasurably superior in *technique* and handling to the picture before him, which he tried to condemn facetiously as the mere daub of an inexperienced woman. Why therefore should it trouble him? Why should this inexperienced woman have been able to put all recollection of these other tremendous artists out of her memory? She had not all the secrets which they had for rendering the texture of the skin or the colouring of the garments. And yet somehow there was a reality about those threadbare garments, worn and old with the



action of the weather. The whole experience was not canny; it was scarcely human. It made him more and more nervous, and it gave him odd ideas which no sacred picture had ever given him before.

The events of his past life were striking him in a new light, as if Powers which he had hitherto ignored or considered as purely benevolent and indulgent to the errors of creatures who were mortal, might possibly prove to be awful, condemnatory, non-exonerating.

That any such Power should be interested in his character seemed to him a thing ridiculous. He got up again and paced the room. It was positively absurd that new and bothering thoughts about the problem of existence should suddenly force themselves upon him. All these things, as he repeated wfo himself, were purely conventional—the world might make its own laws—conventions for the good of the race to be broken in exceptional cases. Possibly if he had his life to go over again a few of the cases in which he had been a law into himself might have been altered, but, after all was said, these exceptions could be put on one side as things that were regrettable and could be excused on the score of youth. It was the height of absurdity that such little slips should be brought back to his memory, recurring to him again and again like the tiresome iteration of a tinkling bell.

He had attempted to silence the tinkling by that effort of will which he had exercised all his life—a masterful effort to put away from him anything uncomfortable. But the tiresome iteration was becoming a sort of clamouring which dedeafened the common-sense on which he had hitherto prided himself. It even seemed to be taking an independent voice as if determined to blurt out things in the silence of the studio. He felt inclined to shout back at it, to terrify it into disappearing, and to inform it with



a mocking laugh that all such things were bogies, fit only to scare women and children. Then he was astonished to find himself arguing. Was it *his* fault if he had been born with a certain temperament, for which the formation of his skull and the convolutions of his brain could alone be held responsible? He reminded himself that character was destiny as he sat in the darkness of the room, dropping his face upon his hands, and trying in vain to emerge from this labyrinth of thought.

Then he had an odd sensation as if he were attempting to hoodwink himself, and he made one more attempt to be master of the situation, telling himself that it was downright droll, this new conceit for reviewing, as if he were a drowning man, the various episodes of his past life; when, if it were all to come over again, everything sinister would probably be enacted in precisely the same fashion—he probably would not be able to help it.

That he should feel as he did at present was a proof that he had been shaken by all the troubles which had happened to him, yet it was childish to allow these speculations to engross him.

He got up once more and walked deliberately towards the picture, with the sudden intention of turning it round so that the eyes should no longer confront him. As he began to move it, a little piece of sketching canvas which had been carefully concealed behind it fluttered down and fell on the floor. He took it up and examined it. It was merely a rough sketch—done with few touches in the French impressionist style—a pillow—a part of a bed, and then—two faces. One was the face of a dying woman with pleading eyes, sunken in their orbits and seeming to gaze from a distance—with dishevelled golden hair spread over the pillow, and shadowy hands stretched out as if to emphasize her piteous request, whilst crawling on the bed by her



side and resting its dimpled cheek on its mother's thin one was a little innocent fair-haired child. He threw the sketch down as if it had stung him, and swore aloud. Was it some overmastering instinct which had compelled his wife to record this haunting memory, so truthful in the likeness, so harrowing in the expression of the yearning eyes and then to hide it away where no one would ever find it behind the tender reproachful face of the Christ? He could not tell—he could not think, but queer ideas of independent existence, which seemed to take form and become visible—with an odd resemblance to the bacteria of physical disease, which he had seen magnified and recorded on paper—were somehow chasing each other in his brain. They tumbled about and confused him, challenging him to catch them and jarring with each other.

He breathed heavily and longed for air. One of the windows was open; he staggered to it and put his head out gasping for breath, remaining there till the darkness began to fall, and then the nervousness became so intolerable that it was impossible for him to stay in the room. He felt that if he were to encounter his wife for the first time in the presence of this painting he should be unable to speak to her with proper energy. But as he got up to leave he determined to adopt another cue in speaking of Zina. He would call her scatter-brained and even mad. He was not sure that he himself was not beginning to be a little mad as he staggered out of the room, conscious of a second self which seemed strangely to sympathise with his wife's wildest aspirations, her enthusiasms, her exaggerations—a second self which was a disapproving and impassive spectator of the conduct of his first self. This again was a little crazy; it reminded him of De Marsay in Balzac's novel.

“A second self? what is that but another sort of



conscience?" he asked with a feeble attempt to keep up his former sneers at conscience, "which wis a mere matter of education, dependent on climate."

He had always been a proud man, if not a vain one, but he was suddenly ashamed of this characteristic, when the vanity which had hitherto been a low one was transformed to a higher platform. He suffered for the first time from the knowledge of his baseness.

That evening when Zina re-entered her studio and heard that George Layton had been there waiting for her more than an hour, she gave an exclamation of despair, her arms falling by her side. What had she in her life still which it was possible for him to take away from her? Her absolute independence, her liberty to come and go, how long would he leave her this?

"He cannot force me to go back to him without appealing to the law, and he will not do that; he is too proud," she thought, unable for the whole of the next day to settle down to her work, but wandering about, or walking up and down the rooms, as had been her habit once before in the perplexities of her earlier youth.

About a week afterwards she came to Mary, holding a telegram in her hand, "Eva has written to me," she said, "I ought to have told you before. George Layton is seriously ill—they think he is dying."

Mary could not see the face which was turned away from her with the eyes closed to hide the fact that Zina had been weeping bitterly. She was trying if possible to keep back the tears.

"Do not be afraid," said Mary in her confident way. "He will not die yet—he has too much to learn."

"I said that nothing would make me go to him—unless he were on his death-bed—but I cannot keep



away now. I should reproach myself if I did. Yet if I thought they were playing me a trick," cried Zina passionately, speaking in an altered voice, with her face still turned from the light.

"They would not dare to do that," answered Mary.

One sight of the sick man, unconscious and raving in delirium, proved that whatever else Eva might have been guilty of in her desire to patch up matters, this was no trick. It was nothing but the old story, a finale which any one with a particle of common-sense might easily have predicted. For George Layton, who had been neglecting his health during the excitement and mortification of the last few months, and who for some time past had been in the habit of drugging himself because he was sleepless with anxiety, had hurried home feeling more unwell than usual after his visit to his wife's studio, and had taken during the next day or two, long lonely walks in wet weather without changing his clothes on his return. A cold had settled on his lungs, and before he could be persuaded to send for medical aid he had been suffering from pleurisy.

He prided himself on never having been ill in his life and would not acknowledge that he was so, even when almost unconscious. He had struggled against circumstances, ashamed of the visions which came to him when he tossed from side to side of his bed, complaining of his inability to sleep, but the delirium had set in before Zina heard of his illness.

To listen to his self-accusing ravings was one of the most terrible penances which could have been inflicted on her. But if she drew back with a determination not to pry into his secrets, and to hear as little as she could, we will also draw back. For if it is the duty of the story-teller to moralise as little as possible, feeling sure that the exhibition



of life as it is will preach most eloquently for itself, it is equally his duty to draw a veil of compassion over those remorseful agonies of a soul which should be unveiled only to the Creator.

Zina only became conscious as the time passed on of those hundreds of impulses to be unselfish and noble which had come to Layton as to other men. And though they might seem to have departed and left no trace behind, in reality they were yet there.

"He is a hard bad man," she had said to herself, but as she heard him in his wanderings she thought "he is not all bad." For at one time he murmured of spring flowers, and at another of the long hours of a tortured conscience during sleepless nights, worse than the agonies described by Dante. At one time he would call upon Agnes and reproach her for not having told him all the truth about herself, and at another he accused himself of having her murder at his door. At one time he fancied himself at Florence meeting first of all with Zina, and at another in Switzerland with the blossoms on the trees stooping to meet the blossoms on the grass. "You were confiding, but you had relations; they should have helped you to make inquiries," he muttered as he tossed to and fro on his pillows. And then again, "*How* could you imagine I meant to do you so great a wrong, or that you would take it so much to heart?"

Many facts which he had hitherto forgotten came back to his memory, and on those occasions when Zina could not tell how much was true, or how much conjured up by his diseased bodily condition she would put her hands to her ears, and fall on her knees beside the bed.

She had been so little used to prayer, that she could not tell if this were praying.

At any rate it was an effort to trust her own future and that of the man who was suffering also to the



magic of a Love which had power to cast out devils.

She did not venture even to wish that the cup of suffering should be immediately taken away from either of them, for the problem of pain was beginning to be better understood by her, and she saw for the first time how the tragic messenger of sorrow, which had come to her in varying forms at different periods of her life, might have been, after all, an angel in disguise. Her mental effort as she knelt was to put personal wishes on one side, to seek to have herself purged from egotism or passionate desire, and to be swayed only by that Love, which was struggling against the armies of evil, defeating and expelling, whilst it strengthened the impoverished will.

She trembled as she listened to the sick man's mutterings, conscious as she was of misgivings as to what he might say, and yet determined never again to ply him with questions. Who was she to judge him? She had not as yet ventured to call herself a Christian, but she was logical enough to see that if she changed her independent idealism for the idealism of Christianity no plea could go forth from her for release from the life-long vow—even if it were "for worse."

Her sense of paralysis in dealing with these difficulties did not prevent her from effectually aiding the nurses in making vehement efforts for his recovery. The more she concentrated her attention on dealing with the physical disease the less time had she for tormenting herself with all sorts of surmises. And her sympathy in this respect was so great that, as his breathing grew deeper and feebler, a slight tremor seemed to shake her own delicate frame, and her own breathing grew correspondingly troubled.

On the first day when he was perceptibly better she sat perfectly still behind the curtain hoping that he would not notice her. But the depths of



her dark eyes glittered when the physician came and went, reporting favourably on the case.

The first time that the invalid recognised her she was standing over him with a cup. Her smile was a little subdued, but she did not start or turn away from him. He had passed through a fiery ordeal of suffering, which was so far well for him that it might point the way through unselfishness to a higher life. She, too, had suffered, and she could be sorry for him. The Pharisaic spirit, if she had ever had it, was entirely beaten out of her. Nature seemed to have taken its revenge on her, and she was conscious that she was no better than other women.

"I ought to be sorry for you," she said, a few days afterwards, when, in the weariness of convalescence, he was lamenting his disinclination to take up the old threads of life again with the same surroundings, "I ought to be sorry because you are unhappy, and I have been terribly unhappy myself. Who am I, to take it upon me bitterly to condemn?"

But when he suggested that in America or Australia one might turn over a new page in existence, unsullied by memories of the past, and when he looked at her inquiringly, she only assented to the fact. "That is true," she said, "it may be as well to make a break."

"If only for a time?" he added, tentatively, and was a little surprised when she answered:

"That will be a good plan. It is what we both want—a little time."

He went. But she did not offer to go with him. She had nursed him when he was ill and made no parade of her nursing. But it seemed to be all she was capable of—*just then*.

"For better, for worse." She had rebelled in passionate horror like many another woman against the hopeless wreck of all human happiness which



had seemed to be involved in the binding together of two souls so differently constituted in an indissoluble tie from which death only could free her. But she was awake now; she had been dreaming then. Paradoxical as it might sound, she had been wakened by a dream. And she had learnt to see that there are questions of more importance than personal pain.

All thoughts of meting out judgment to a fellow-creature had ceased. Yet something had gone out of her, which no power of the man who still loved her would ever be able to restore. It was heart-rending, for when she searched to the very roots of her life, she found that the dead ashes of it remained—nothing more.

As the Germans say, *hin ist hin*.

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